

The Island and the Storm

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The Island and the Storm

A Social-Cultural History of the Belgian Diplomatic Corps in Times of Democratization, 1885-1935

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Het eiland en de storm

Een sociaal-culturele geschiedenis van het
Belgische diplomatieke corps in tijden van
democratisering, 1885-1935

Promotor: Prof. dr. Marnix Beyen

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door
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PREFACE

The picture on the cover of this thesis is taken by the Canadian nature photographer Don Komarechka. It is called ‘The Island and the Storm’. The picture perfectly captures the basic idea of this study. The Island refers to the imaginary island that diplomats seemed to be living on in the decades before the First World War. The Storm is the war itself, which radically shook the relations between the inhabitants of the island, and between them and the wider society living on the mainland. This place is not visible on the picture. Yet diplomats knew it was there. After the passing of the Storm, they would no longer be able to ignore it.

For more than five years I have tried to work my way towards Diplomatic Island. In some respects, these were long and hard years. In other respects, the journey has passed by so soon and was full of lively conversations and inspiring encounters. I would like to express my utmost gratitude to all those who have created the good times and lightened the burden of the hard times. Without them, this study would never have been written.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor. Marnix Beyen has aptly guided me from the inception of a thesis proposal to the writing of the conclusion of what turned out to be a bulky book. While I really appreciate that Marnix has carefully read and provided many insightful comments on each one of its chapters, I am even more grateful that he has always made time for me when I came knocking on his door with questions, remarks, and concerns, many of which cannot possibly have struck him as particularly important.

Secondly, I would like to thank the members of my doctoral commission, Luc Duerloo and Maarten Van Ginderachter, for annually discussing the progress of this study with me. To Luc I owe an extra debt of gratitude. Once the supervisor of my Master’s Thesis, Luc has never really lost sight of me and has continued to function as a kind of mentor. Like no other, he possesses the gift of motivation, which has helped me to surmount several of the obstacles that I have encountered over the past few years.

Throughout these years, I have greatly benefitted from stimulating conversations with the members of the Center for Political History at the University of Antwerp. Many thanks go to them and also to the members of the Center of Urban History, some of whom – perhaps mistakenly – sometimes ended up in the Political History’s brown bag seminars. I do want to single out just a few colleagues and former colleagues whose help, advice or mere presence I have greatly appreciated, namely Dries Raeymaekers for the warm welcome he gave me at the History Department and for the many interesting discussions, Aline Sax for putting up with

my annoying self in her office for almost three years, Kaspar Beelen and Vincent Scheltiens for the uncountable lunch-time conversations about sports, academics and other kinds of politics, Nicolas Mazeure for correcting my letters to French-speaking diplomatic barons and floriculturist counts, Bart Tritsmans, Gerrit Verhoeven, and Brecht Deseure for the soothing conversations, Tim Bisschops for granting me access to the world of databases, and finally Houssine Alloul for sharing with me the burden of a *centre de gravité*.

Also outside of the History Department, a lot of people have helped me to find Diplomatic Island. Peter Van Kemseke, Maarten Van Alstein, Rik Coolsaet, and Antony Best pointed me in the right direction, while the personnel of the *Directie Archief van de FOD Buitenlandse Zaken*, the *Algemeen Rijksarchief*, the *Archief van het Koninklijk Paleis* and the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* provided me with the necessary materials to chart the island. I would particularly like to thank Didier Amaury of the Foreign Ministry Archives, Gustaaf Janssens of the Royal Palace Archives, Véronique Wese of the Royal Library, and the honorary Ambassador Baron Henri Beyens, who kindly granted me access to the private papers of his grandfather and this story's protagonist.

Despite the help, advice and benevolence of all the aforementioned persons, in the final stages of the journey my boat was leaking and I was about to give up. The fault for that, of course, lay with me entirely. I only really regained hope when the Directors of the *Leibniz Institut für Europäische Geschichte* in Mainz threw me a life buoy. I am very grateful to Irene Dingel and Johannes Paulmann for inviting me to the IEG and allowing me to stay for nine months. That I finally made it to Diplomatic Island is at least partly due to the solidarity and support of the people who were in the same boat as I, and in particular to David Luginbuhl, Sandra Herron, Pascal Firges, Gauri Parasher, Jorge Lluengo, Olga Sparschuh, and Sophie Schifferdecker. Special thanks go to John Carter Wood, my mentor at the IEG, whose comments on my first chapters forced me to sometimes take a more distant look at what was happening on the island.

Thanks to my friends for reminding me that there is life outside of academia, although I must admit that I have more often than not failed to heed the call. Many thanks also to my family, to my parents, my grand-parents, and my brothers for the support that I have received from them in very different ways. I am particularly grateful to my mom for taking me in as a part-time resident in Hotel Mama during the most critical stages of the writing process, and to Hans for printing and driving whenever I desired. Finally, my deepest and most sincere gratitude goes to Liesbeth, who in so many ways is the main reason that I have finally

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LISTS OF ABBREVIATIONS, FIGURES, AND TABLES

ABBREVIATIONS

ADCB = Annuaire diplomatique et consulaire de Belgique
AE = Archief van het privé-secretariaat van Albert en Elizabeth
AKA = Archief van het Kabinet van Albert
AKP = Archief van het Koninklijk Paleis
AMBZ = Archief van het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken
AR = Almanach Royal
ARA = Algemeen Rijksarchief
ASA = Archief van het Secretariaat van Albert
BCB = Biographie coloniale belge / Biographie Belge d’Outre-Mer
BN = Biographie nationale de Belgique
BTNG = Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis
CRCCF = Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne française
EPNB = Etat présent de la noblesse belge
FFB = Fonds de la Famille de Buisserset
NA = National Archives
PDK = Parlementaire Documenten: Kamer
PHK = Parlementaire Handelingen: Kamer
PHS = Parlementaire Handelingen: Senaat
SOMA = Studie- en documentatiecentrum oorlog en hedendaagse maatschappij

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INTRODUCTION

In Autumn 1935, in a column in Belgium's leading journal of ideas, Viscount Henri Davignon wondered: "How come nowadays so much attention is devoted to our diplomats, why are they put in the spotlight, how come their names are making the headlines – just like the names of movie stars?"¹ Son of a former Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs and brother of a rising star in the Belgian *corps diplomatique*, Davignon knew the world of diplomacy very well.² In the article, he elaborated extensively on the allegedly golden times of the Brussels diplomatic community before 1914. Only at the very end of the column, and without even mentioning the war and its aftermath, Davignon tried to explain the Belgian public's interest in its diplomats: "Perhaps because compared to the common improvisation that guides domestic politics and financial experiments, diplomats stand out as specialist phenomena. Their opinion matters little, neither does their private life. They are by definition communicators and executors. But their skill makes them appear as creators and magicians [...] They do not rely on overbidding, nor on intrigues, but on facts, on human experience, on reality. And so, compared to ideologues and politicians, a prestige has descended upon them, that of the arbitrator. Alas! when the game deviates from the traditional rules, it is an unrewarding profession."³

Diplomats in Times of Democratization

Considering the current narrative about the history of diplomatic practice in Europe during the early twentieth century, Davignon's statements are remarkable. Ever since the late nineteenth century, processes of democratization, characterized by franchise extensions and by the rise of the mass media, had made Western governments increasingly aware of a public opinion that viewed international politics as relations between peoples rather than as interactions between states, and thus pressed for transparency and accountability towards the people in the making of foreign policy. As it involved entire societies into the war effort, the First World War undeniably proved the existing system of diplomacy unfit for keeping the peace and brought the diplomats to public justice. How could they not have avoided the war from happening? In

¹ DAVIGNON, Henri, "Diplomatie et Diplomates", *La Revue générale*, 7 October 1935, 505-510. On *La Revue générale*, see PIEPERS, N., *La Revue générale de 1865 à 1940: essai d'analyse du contenu*, Bijdragen van het Interuniversitair Centrum voor Hedendaagse Geschiedenis, 52, Leuven, 1968.

² See DUMONT, Georges-Henri, "DAVIGNON, Henri", *Nouvelle Biographie Nationale*, 8, Brussels, 2005, 81-83; VANLANGENHOVE, Fernand, "DAVIGNON, Jacques", *Biographie Nationale*, 39, Brussels, 1976, 224-236; WILLEQUET, Jacques, "DAVIGNON, Julien", *Biographie Nationale*, 40, Brussels, 1978, 165-167.

³ DAVIGNON, "Diplomatie et Diplomates", 510.

most belligerent countries, diplomats faced accusations of gross incompetence, of conspiratorial machinations, and even of outright bellicosity. Critical voices argued for a new kind of diplomacy, that was based on publicity, openness and co-operation between peoples. These voices stimulated the creation of the League of Nations after the war as well as the rise of conference diplomacy in the 1920s. Dominated by democratically elected politicians, these institutions threatened to remove traditional diplomats from the centre of world politics. Likewise, opinions expressed in press and parliament urging governments to broaden the access to the diplomatic corps and to restructure career patterns along more meritocratic lines, could no longer be ignored. The 1930s saw the residential diplomats' professional activities regaining significance. However, this was largely due to the consolidation of totalitarian regimes, which compelled diplomats to conform to the 'deviant diplomacy' advocated by the leaders of these regimes, in order to gain their favour. At the same time, they had to take into account public sentiment in their home countries.⁴

Davignon's concluding remark, that deviation from traditional diplomatic rules made diplomacy a thankless task, indicates his awareness of this evolution. His brother Jacques had very recently been appointed to lead the Belgian legation in Hitler's Germany, and Davignon certainly bore this nomination in mind when writing. More generally, however, he was defending traditional diplomacy in a rapidly changing national and international political climate.

In favour of Davignon, it must be mentioned that in the later interwar years, large segments of public opinion felt increasingly disillusioned by the party-political squabbling in Western parliaments, and therefore urged for a more decisive and authoritative executive power.⁵ Diplomats, as executors par excellence, possibly benefited from this political climate.

⁴ See especially HAMILTON, Keith and Richard LANGHORNE, *The Practice of Diplomacy*, London, 2011 [1995], 93-184; BLACK, Jeremy, *A History of Diplomacy*, London, 2010, 166-205; PAULMANN, Johannes, "Diplomatie", in Jost DÜLFFER and Winfried LOTH (eds.), *Dimensionen internationaler Geschichte*, München, 2012, 47-64; BLESSING, Ralph, "A Changing Diplomatic World", in Gordon MARTEL (ed.), *A Companion to International History 1900-2001*, Blackwell Companions to History, Malden, 2007, 65-77; and TAMSE, Coen A., "De diplomatieke revolutie van 1919 en de omslag in de internationale politieke cultuur", *Groniek*, 30/137, 1996-1997, 443-456. See also ANDERSON, Matthew S., *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1454-1919*, Harlow, 1993, 136-148; and the introductions in LEVILLAIN, Philippe and Brunello VIGEZZI (eds.), *Opinion publique et politique extérieure. II: 1915-1940. Colloque organisé par l'Ecole française de Rome et le Centro per gli studi di politica estera e opinione pubblica de l'Università de Milan, Rome 16-20 février 1981*, Rome, 1984; and in CRAIG, Gordon A. and Felix GILBERT, (eds.), *The Diplomats, 1919-1939*, Princeton, 1994 [1953].

⁵ See MAZOWER, Mark, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century*, London, 1997, Chapter 1; HOBSBAWM, Eric, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London, 1994, 135-141. For Belgium, see GERARD, Emmanuel, "De democratie gedroomd, begrensd en ondermijnd, 1918-1939", in Michel DUMOULIN, et. al. (eds.), in *Nieuwe Geschiedenis van België, deel II: 1905-1950*, Tiel, 2005, Chapter 11 (especially pp. 1065-1067).

Perhaps they even stirred the public's imagination as mysterious foreign policy experts who transcended the quarrelling in liberal democracy's 'chatter boxes'.

Nevertheless, it remains striking that, as Davignon seems to suggest, public opinion had changed so radically by the mid-1930s. Even more so if one takes into account that he keeps his reader in the dark about the evolution of the diplomat's public image during the more than two decades that separated the source of his nostalgic reflections from his moment of reminiscence. Might these have been times that Davignon, as a scion of a recently ennobled family of diplomats, did not wish to remember?

Looking for answers in Belgian historiography would yield a meagre harvest. Asked to write a paper about domestic public opinion on Belgium's foreign policy between 1915 and 1940, Jacques Willequet, a former professor at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*, chose to devote no attention at all to the country's diplomats. Actually, he did not devote much attention to public opinion on Belgian diplomacy either. Instead, he wrote what could be labelled as a justification of Belgian foreign policy, flavoured with very selective impressions of public opinion and with personal comments regarding the "fundamental aspiration of Belgians [...] to always wanting to be on good terms with all their neighbours."⁶ Willequet's decision not to write a critical article about this topic probably had a lot to do with his personal convictions as a Belgian patriot and his part-time function as *conseiller juridique*, or historical advisor, of the Belgian Foreign Ministry. In that quality, Willequet tended to set himself up as a protector of Belgium's international reputation.⁷

Since the publication of Willequet's article thirty years ago, no historian has undertaken to really look into the matter, let alone to take such research one or two steps further.⁸ No historian has investigated how changes in the social status of early twentieth century Belgian diplomats affected their mental world, and the way they reacted to these challenges from public opinion.

Neither do these questions receive answers in the fairly recently published *Les diplomates belges*. This book offers a history of Belgian diplomats since 1830 and seems to

⁶ WILLEQUET, Jacques, "Opinion publique et politique étrangère belge, 1915-1940", in LEVILLAIN and VIGEZZI, *Opinion publique*, 17-23.

⁷ See for instance VANTHEMSCHE, Guy, "De historiografie van het Belgische kolonialisme in Congo", in Guy VANTHEMSCHE, Machteld DE METSENAERE, and Jean-Claude BURGELMAN (eds.), *De tuin van heden : dertig jaar wetenschappelijk onderzoek over de hedendaagse Belgische samenleving*, Brussels, 2007, 423 and 448-449.

⁸ There is, however, a small-scale, unpublished study of press representations of Belgian diplomats in 1909, 1919, 1924, and 1929. See VAN DEN EYNDE, Jens, *'La morale est que le peuple doit pouvoir contrôler la diplomatie': de representatie van de diplomaat in de Belgische dagbladpers (1909-1929)*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, Universiteit Antwerpen, 2012.

serve two, somewhat paradoxical purposes: one is to underline the mystical lustre and the elite dignity of the diplomatic career; the other is to prove the democratic character of the Belgian diplomatic corps. The author of *Les diplomates belges*, the Belgian ambassador Raoul Delcorde, does seem to partly contradict Davignon's statements about the golden times of Belgian diplomatic life before the First World War. In the first pages of his book, he indeed cites two examples of parliamentarians who, in 1895 and 1913, labelled diplomats as useless because of their economic incompetence and as undemocratic because of their aristocratic descent. Yet Delcorde only uses these quotes – “clichés”, in his view – to implicitly argue that if there were times when Belgium was represented by an aristocratic diplomatic corps, these times were long gone; and that regardless of their social backgrounds, Belgian diplomats had greatly contributed to establishing and maintaining the position of their country as an actor rather than as a stake on the world scene. To support his arguments, Delcorde provides a historical overview which essentially draws on two eventful periods in Belgian international history. The first is that of the young Belgian state, when a group of bourgeois rather than aristocratic diplomats managed to consolidate the country's independence. The second is that of the post-1945 years, when the democratically recruited Belgian diplomatic corps succeeded to give Belgium a voice on the multilateral scene. Conversely, the two decades after the outbreak of the First World War are dealt with in less than two pages. Furthermore, from these two pages Belgian diplomats are conspicuously absent.⁹ Given that with Davignon, Willequet, and Delcorde, three ‘insiders’ to the Belgian Foreign Ministry seem to deliberately neglect to inquire into the interaction between diplomats and the public they represented in the early twentieth century, a distrustful historian might be led to think that the results of such inquiry could well be very revealing.

The present study is written in the conviction that they are. To prove this point, it puts this inquiry into a wider perspective. More specifically, this study examines how processes of democratization have revealed themselves in the evolution of the diplomat's culture. Focusing on the Belgian diplomatic corps as a test case and investigating the social and professional practices and discourses of its members, it sheds light, from without and within, on a fundamental phase in the diplomatic corps' transition from a European aristocratic fraternity to the international meritocratic elite that it is today. Apart from that, it contributes to our

⁹ DELCORDE, Raoul, *Les diplomates belges*, Wavre, 2010. For a more elaborate critique of this book, see AUWERS, Michael, “Recensie van ‘Raoul Delcorde, *Les diplomates belges*, Mardaga: Wavre, 2010’”, *Mededelingenblad van de Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 33/1, 2011, 38-40.

understanding of the process of negotiation between – what could be labelled as – “pre-modern” and “modern” ways of conceiving and articulating international relations.

The historical phase studied in this work roughly coincides with the half century before Davignon published his thoughts about the public prestige of Belgian diplomats. In Belgium, especially the period between the mid-1880s and the early 1920s witnessed the broadening of political democracy, most notably in the form of several franchise extensions and in the rise of the mass media.¹⁰ These were years when, to rephrase Aristotle’s theory of mixed government, the triangular relation between the one, the few, and the many underwent considerable changes, in both the realms of domestic and foreign policy.¹¹ In this story, the one is the Belgian king, the few are the Belgian governing politicians, and the many are the Belgian public, whose opinions on diplomats and diplomacy seem to have been primarily voiced in parliament and in the press. The present study explores this changing relationship from the perspective of Belgian diplomats, who especially in the beginning of this period were closely associated with the one. This association came under pressure in the wake of the two major episodes in the Belgian diplomatic history of the fifty years under scrutiny, namely the acquisition of a colony by King Leopold II in 1885 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Albeit with a different intensity, both these episodes impacted processes of democratization in Belgium.

Writing the Political into Social-Cultural History

Investigating the interaction of these processes with Belgian diplomatic culture, this study draws on different historiographical fields while at the same time contributing to them. One of these is the history of Belgian foreign policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Very popular in the 1970s and 1980s, this field has produced many valuable studies of how ‘Belgium’ moved as an actor on the international scene in a time when its independence was repeatedly threatened. However, the field of Belgian foreign policy history never really managed to transcend the small states paradigm which in some cases led scholars to personify these entities and in other cases over-emphasized the role of national politicians

¹⁰ WITTE, Els, Jan CRAEYBECKX, and Alain MEYNEN, *Politieke geschiedenis van België: van 1830 tot heden*, Antwerp, 2005, 107-133; DENECKERE, Gita, “1878-1905”, in Els WITTE, et. al. (eds.), *Nieuwe Geschiedenis van België, deel I: 1830-1905*, Tielt, 2005, 500-538; DUMOULIN, Michel, “Het ontluiken van de twintigste eeuw. 1905-1918”, in DUMOULIN, *Nieuwe Geschiedenis van België, deel II*, 749-750.

¹¹ See “Ancient History Sourcebook: Aristotle: from The Politics, c. 340 BCE”, Website of Fordham University. < <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/aristotle-politics1.asp> >, consulted on 30 January 2014.

in foreign-policy making. Up to now, it has devoted only very little attention to the agency and mental worlds of the diplomats who executed the country's foreign policy.¹²

This might seem somewhat surprising, given that diplomatic historians have long widened their scope to include analyses of the historical context of diplomacy in all its complexities, which implies devoting considerable attention to the outlooks of its practitioners.¹³ The reviving interest in diplomacy after the Cold War and the reappraisal of Diplomatic History in the form of an actor-oriented approach, have prepared the ground for numerous studies of (parts of) the individual careers of early twentieth century diplomats.¹⁴ Multi-archival research has allowed the authors of these books to draw on a much wider variety of documents than the obligatory official correspondence and published memoirs and diaries that many of their predecessors had to resort to.¹⁵ Surely, the main concern of these works remains with their protagonist's share in foreign-policy making. However, they also consider diplomatic world views, career aspirations and other matters relating to social and professional status. None of such biographies have been published about Belgian diplomats.¹⁶

¹² HELMREICH, Jonathan, *Belgium and Europe. A Study in Small State Diplomacy*, New Haven, 1976, 118-310; PALO, Michael F., *The Diplomacy of Belgian War Aims during the First World War*, unpublished PhD-thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 1977, published on demand by University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, 1978; MARKS, Sally, *Innocent Abroad. Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, Chapel Hill, 1981; THOMAS, Daniel H., *The guarantee of Belgian independence and neutrality in European diplomacy, 1830's-1930's*, Kingston, 1983, 319-598; DE WAELE, Maria, *Naar een groter België. De Belgische territoriale eisen tijdens en na de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, unpublished PhD-thesis, Universiteit Gent, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 1989; COOLSAET, Rik, *België en zijn buitenlandse politiek*, Leuven, 2001, 137-267.

¹³ Interesting reflections on this evolution are: URBACH, Karina, "Diplomatic history since the cultural turn", *The Historical Journal*, 46/4, 2003, 991-997; JACKSON, Peter, "Pierre Bourdieu, the 'cultural turn' and the practice of international history", *Review of International Studies*, 34, 2008, 155-181; GRAM-SKJOLDAGER, Karen, "Never Talk to Strangers? On Historians, Political Scientists and the Study of Diplomacy in the European Community/European Union", *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 22/4, 2011, 1-19; JEANNESSON, Stanislas, "Diplomatie et politique étrangère de la France contemporaine: un bilan historiographique depuis 1990", *Histoire, économie & société*, 31/2, 2012, 87-98.

¹⁴ This interest has been manifested most clearly in French and in Anglo-Saxon historiography. See for instance VILATTE, Laurent, *La République des diplomates. Paul et Jules Cambon, 1843-1935*, Paris, 2002; DENÉCHÈRE, Yves, *Jean Herbette (1878-1960)*, Paris, 2003; JEANNESSON, Stanislas, *Jacques Seydoux (1870-1929), diplomate*, Paris, 2012; HERMAN, John, *The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps: Anglo-French relations and the Foreign Office, 1937-1939*, Portland, 1998; and JOHNSON, Gaynor, *The Berlin Embassy of Lord D'Abernon 1920-1926*, Basingstoke, 2002; HALFOND, Irwin, *Maurice Paléologue: The Diplomat, the Writer, the Man, and the Third French Republic*, Lanham, 2007; GREENWOOD, Sean, *Titan at the Foreign Office: Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the Modern World*, Leiden, 2008.

¹⁵ See the essays in CRAIG and GILBERT, *The Diplomats*.

¹⁶ However, historians can find valuable information in unpublished works stored in university libraries. See for instance DUMOULIN, Michel, *La carrière diplomatique du baron Maximilien d'Erp (1868 - 1915)*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 1975; CLAEYS BOUART, Luce, *Le Baron Emile de Cartier de Marchienne. Missions diplomatiques en Chine et aux Etats-Unis*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 1977; BOELENS, Saskia, *Correspondentie uit het Morgenland. De Belgisch-Duitse betrekkingen van 1932-1935 doorheen de diplomatieke correspondentie van Graaf André de Kerchove de Denterghem*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Universiteit Gent, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 1992; MERTENS, Matthias, *1917: De ruïne van*

Since the turn of the century, several historians of diplomacy have also begun to amalgamate their interpretations of a wide variety of source material with insights from other disciplines, most notably sociology, anthropology, and International Relations (IR) Theory. This has stimulated the production of studies that pay great attention to changes in the practices, perceptions and self-fashioning of diplomats, and often revolve around the theme of diplomatic culture, a concept which still lacks a clear definition.¹⁷ Notwithstanding the ambition of such research to bridge the boundaries between the various subdisciplines within historiography, a distinction can be made between ‘political’ and ‘social’ histories of diplomatic culture.

Political histories of diplomatic culture deal with the formulation and execution of foreign policy. However, rather than focusing on the contents and outcomes of negotiations, they endeavour to probe into the mental world of diplomats by analysing how their world views and ideas about international relations influenced the way they exercised their professional activities, i.e. how they reported about their dealings with foreign colleagues, interpreted diplomatic ceremonial, or resorted to forms of ‘cultural diplomacy’ to further the interests of their governments.¹⁸

The present study gratefully draws inspiration from these developments in diplomatic historiography in order to write Belgian diplomats back into the history of Belgian foreign policy. To identify the agency and influence of diplomats in this field, it recurs to a resolutely

het oude Corps Diplomatique? Oude en nieuwe diplomatie en de casus baron Paul de Groote, unpublished Master’s Thesis, Universiteit Antwerpen, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 2011.

¹⁷ An illustrative example of such studies is KOCHO-WILLIAMS, Alastair, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900-1939*, Basingstoke, 2012. Kocho-Williams has convincingly adapted Pierre Bourdieu’s social theories to demonstrate how Soviet diplomats after the Russian revolution failed to change the rules that dominated the diplomatic field, but later on succeeded in displaying a suitable diplomatic habitus that gained them access to the international diplomatic community.

¹⁸ See especially the essays in MÖSSLANG, Markus and Torsten RIOTTE (eds.), *The Diplomats’ World: The Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815-1914*, Oxford, 2008. For critical comments on this historiography, see REYNOLDS, David, “International History, the Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch”, *Cultural and Social History*, 3, 2006, 75-91; SCHWEIZER, Karl and Matt J. SCHUMANN, “The Revitalization of Diplomatic History: Renewed Reflections”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19, 2008, 149-186. Belgian historian Maarten Van Alstein has contributed to this research area by studying how Belgium’s foreign policy was influenced by the attitudes of the country’s diplomats towards hostile bipolarization during the early Cold War period. See VAN ALSTEIN, Maarten, *De Belgische diplomatieke elite, Spaak, en het ontstaan van de hegemonische Koude Oorlogsconsensus. Interpretaties van de vijandige bipolarisering, 1944-1949*, unpublished PhD-thesis, Universiteit Antwerpen, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, 2009. Parts of Van Alstein’s thesis have been published in *Cold War History* (9/3, 2009) and *Journal of Cold War Studies* (13/3, 2011). Seemingly, the work of another Belgian historian, Bertrand Herremans, also ties in with this tendency. Although his studies about the Belgian diplomats’ views on the Jewish question and on the issue of nationalities in Central Europe in the interwar provide valuable empirical information, there are some problems with his methodology. See AUWERS, Michael, “Bertrand Herremans, Entre terreur rouge et peste brune, la Belgique livide (1918-1940). La diplomatie belge face aux Juifs et aux antisémites, Brussel, André Versailles éditeur, 2012”, *Mededelingenblad van de Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 35/3, 2013, 20-22. See also HERREMANS, Bertrand, *Guerres de cabinets*, unpublished PhD-thesis, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 2007.

empirical approach buttressed by a narrativist methodology. This implies resorting to an often highly detailed description of how the actions and ideas of Belgian diplomats related to those of the Belgian kings and to those of the members of the country's government, parliament, and public. The history of Belgian diplomats in times of democratization is indeed determined by both contingency, volition, and necessity. As such, only a meticulous awareness of the chronology, sequence and temporal duration of events allows us to capture this history in all its complexity. The narrative as an interpretive act committed to evocation and dramatization lends itself to the realization of a more complete, not to say 'holistic' history of these diplomats.¹⁹

Of course, such history has to transcend the mere political history of Belgian diplomatic culture. In fact, while acknowledging that the 'political' and 'social' aspects of Belgian diplomatic culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are inextricably intertwined, strictly speaking the present study devotes more attention to the latter. As it is conceived in this study, the history of Belgian diplomatic culture in times of democratization deals primarily with the position of Belgian diplomats within Belgian society. In this way, it primarily wishes to contribute to the social history of diplomatic culture.

Arguably, the seeds for this field were planted under the influence of historiography's 'social turn' some fifty years ago. From the late 1960s to the 1990s, diplomatic historians have conducted prosopographic research into the Foreign Offices of the Great Powers involved in the First World War. To be sure, in doing so these scholars did not just abandon the paradigms which had dominated their field since its inception as a scholarly discipline in the nineteenth century. Examining social backgrounds, career patterns and patronage networks of European diplomats in the decades before 1914, they have indeed tried to measure the influence of French, British, German, Russian and Austro-Hungarian diplomatic elites on the formulation of their countries' foreign policy. The results of their research led some to conclude that contemporary critics of diplomacy were right in holding professional diplomats responsible for the drift towards war.²⁰ Others, however, found that diplomats did not actually matter in decision-making.²¹ The latter scholars' views were perfectly compatible

¹⁹ ROBERTS, Geoffrey, "History, theory and the narrative turn in IR", *Review of International Studies*, 32, 2006, 703-714.

²⁰ See HAYNE, M.B., *The French Foreign Office and the Origins of the First World War, 1898-1914*, Oxford, 1993; GODSEY, William D. Jr., *Aristocratic Redoubt. The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Office on the Eve of the First World War*, West Lafayette, 1999.

²¹ STEINER, Zara S., *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914*, Cambridge, 1969; JONES, Raymond A., *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815-1914*, Gerrards Cross, 1983; CECIL, Lamar, *The German Diplomatic Service, 1871-1914*, Princeton, 1976; HUGHES, Michael, *Diplomacy Before the Russian Revolution: Britain, Russia, and the Old Diplomacy, 1894-1917*, Basingstoke, 2000.

with Cold War thinking about diplomacy as a trifling tool of foreign policy. Added to the relative absence of diplomats in the war-guilt question of 1939, when the public had become accustomed to witnessing political leaders conducting international relations, this might explain the absence of in-depth prosopographies of interwar national diplomatic communities.²² As for the Belgian case, in the 1960s and the 1980s, selective enquiries into the personnel files at the Belgian Foreign Ministry Archives have enabled a few master's students to draw up elements of a collective biography of the Belgian diplomatic corps in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Given that access to these files is more restricted nowadays than it was in the early 1980s, their works contain valuable and otherwise inaccessible information for the social and cultural history of Belgium's diplomatic corps.²³

In general, most of the existing sociological-institutional histories of national diplomatic communities provide interesting insights into the ways in which the diplomatic career created meaning for its members. What their authors do not, however, is convincingly demonstrate how social backgrounds, career patterns and patronage networks related to the diplomats' actual influence (or absence of influence) on the making and execution of foreign policy. Neither, and this is more important in the framework of the present study, do they explain how diplomats interacted with the people who they were supposed to represent beyond Belgium's border. One step in that direction would have been to include more 'cultural' elements in the social history of diplomats, culture being intrinsic to social practice.

In the last decade, a few social histories of diplomatic culture have seen the light. These could be regarded as revitalizations of the older, prosopographic approach, albeit the influence of diplomats on foreign policy issues no longer dominates the research agenda.

²² However, some articles and book chapters have been published. See for instance the essays by Jean-Claude Allain, Peter Krüger, and Georges-Henri Soutou in HUDEMANN, Rainer and Georges-Henri SOUTOU (eds.), *Eliten in Deutschland und Frankreich im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Strukturen und Beziehungen*, 1, Munich, 1994, 265-291 and 303-314; ULDRICKS, Teddy J., "The Soviet Diplomatic Corps in the Čičerin Era", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 23/2, 1975, 213-224.

²³ DELSEMME, Martine, *Contribution à l'histoire du corps diplomatique belge. Les agents entrés dans la carrière entre 1831 et 1850*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 1966; ROOSENS, Claude, *Agents diplomatiques belges. Conditions de recrutement (1830-1980)*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 1983; KONINCKX, Marie-Helena, *De Belgische diplomatieke dienst. Biografisch en sociaal-economisch profiel van de diplomatieke posthoofden in de periode 1920-1940*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Universiteit Gent, Faculty of Law, 1985. Parts of the theses of Delsemme and Roosens have been published, see DELSEMME, Martine, "Quelques aspects sociaux de la carrière diplomatique. Etude relative aux agents entrés dans les services extérieurs de la Belgique entre 1831 et 1850", in Nicole CARCAN-CHANEL and Martine DELSEMME, *Agents diplomatiques belges et étrangers aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Deux études économique-sociales*, Brussels, 1968, 9-63; ROOSENS, Claude, "Agents diplomatiques belges. Conditions de recrutement", in *La politique extérieure de la Belgique, 1984-1985*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1986, 105-149; and ROOSENS, Claude, "L'accès à la carrière diplomatique en Belgique. Facteurs favorables", in *La politique extérieure de la Belgique, 1986*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1987, 139-171.

These are studies of ‘thick’ prosopography, as one practitioner aptly puts it, dealing with diplomatic mentalities ‘for their own sake’ and reconstructing common practices, beliefs, and identities of professional diplomats as a social group.²⁴

Of course, in itself such a *l’art pour l’art* approach of diplomatic mentalities would not suffice to find out how processes of democratization have revealed themselves in the history of diplomatic culture. Since these processes are fundamentally political, the diplomats’ attitudes towards political transformations need to be accounted for. In her as yet unpublished dissertation about French diplomats between 1871 and 1914, Isabelle Dasque does precisely that. On the one hand, she infuses a traditional prosopographic methodology with issues of gender, literary self-constructions, and diplomatic sociability in foreign postings. On the other hand, her work also reveals an attentive awareness to the tensions between the diplomats’ identities as executors of their nations’ foreign policy and their membership of a cosmopolitan diplomatic community. In this regard, Dasque devotes considerable attention to how French diplomats dealt with the rise of nationalism in their home country. She also studies how members of the French diplomatic corps perceived the early stages of the crisis of French parliamentarianism and looks into the way they interacted with representatives of the world of politics.²⁵

The present study elaborates on this approach to more resolutely write the political into the social-cultural history of diplomats in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First, it chooses to adopt a more thorough negotiating perspective between diplomats on the one hand, and the three poles of ‘mixed government’ in Belgium on the other hand. This implies scrutinizing the changing relations between diplomats and the monarchy, between diplomats and the members of the government, and between diplomats and parliamentarians and journalists. Second, it chooses to adopt the perspective of the diplomatic corps of a minor and neutral state on the international scene. Arguably, the different stakes of such a state in comparison with those of the much studied Great Powers

²⁴ MORI, Jennifer, *The Culture of Diplomacy. Britain in Europe, c. 1750-1830*, Manchester, 2010, 1-3.

²⁵ DASQUE, Isabelle, *A la recherche de M. de Norpois : les diplomates de la République (1871-1914)*, unpublished PhD-thesis, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 2005. See also: DASQUE, Isabelle, “A la recherche de Monsieur de Norpois: prosopographie des ambassadeurs et des ministres plénipotentiaires sous la Troisième République (1871-1914)”, *Revue d’Histoire Diplomatique*, 4, 2000, 261-288; DASQUE, Isabelle, “De la sociabilité des diplomates à la fin du XIXe siècle: codes et pratiques”, in J.P. CHALINE (eds.), *Elites et sociabilité en France. Actes du colloque organisé le 22 janvier 2003*, Paris, 2003, 259-282; DASQUE, Isabelle, “Être femme de diplomate au début du XXe siècle: pouvoir social et pouvoir d’influence”, in Yves DENECHERE (ed.), *Femmes et diplomatie. France – XXe siècle*, Brussels, 2005, 23-41; DASQUE, Isabelle, “Une élite en mutation: les diplomates de la République (1871-1914)”, *Histoire, économie et société*, 26/4, 2007, 81-98. Dasque has also written an interesting prosopographic article on the interwar years, see DASQUE, Isabelle, “La diplomatie française au lendemain de la Grande Guerre: bastion d’une aristocratie au service de l’État”, *Vingtième Siècle*, 2008, 99, 33-49.

affected the ways in which the institution of diplomacy created meaning for its practitioners. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the present study chooses to lift the social-cultural history of diplomats over the threshold of the First World War. Contrary to the many social and social-cultural histories of diplomatic communities, most of which tend to offer fairly static portraits of diplomats in an age when the paradigms of ‘traditional’ diplomacy still predominated the conduct of international relations, on the international level this study scrutinizes how diplomats dealt with what contemporaries labelled as the transition from ‘old’ to ‘new’ diplomacy.²⁶ On the domestic level, it takes into account how this elite social group reacted to the social and political transformations caused by the sweeping event of the world war.

The identification of the diplomatic corps as an elite group brings us to the third historiographical field which this study draws from and contributes to. While having suffered, in the age of structuralism, from similar prejudices as Diplomatic History, research on late modern elite cultures in Western societies has regained significance since the publication of Arno J. Mayer’s seminal study on the persisting influence of *ancien regime* elites up to 1914.²⁷ Belgian historiography has put its oar in with prosopographic studies of journalists, writers and bankers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁸ Diplomats, however, remain conspicuously absent in the literature. Tellingly, in the major works on the nineteenth-century nobility, only a handful of pages are devoted to the role of this social group in diplomacy.²⁹ In the meantime, however, we become ever better informed about how large parts of the upper classes since the nineteenth century have experienced and dealt with the consequences of democratization and, more broadly, modernization. Stimulating comparative research has appeared on how European aristocracies reacted to the surge of the Radical Right in the interwar years.³⁰ We have also learned how nineteenth century parliamentarians in France and Britain faced franchise extensions and mass media reporting, in an age when the rules of the political game were changing. On the one hand they were forced to

²⁶ For a recent revision of the literature on this transition, see WEISBRODE, Kenneth, *Old Diplomacy Revisited A Study in the Modern History of Diplomatic Transformations*, Basingstoke, 2013.

²⁷ MAYER, Arno J., *The Persistence of the Old Régime: Europe to the Great War*, New York, 1981.

²⁸ VAN DEN DUNGEN, Pierre, *Milieus de presse et journalistes en Belgique (1828-1914)*, Brussels, 2005; VERBRUGGEN, Christophe, *Schrijverschap in de Belgische belle époque. Een sociaal-culturele geschiedenis culturele geschiedenis*, Nijmegen and Ghent, 2009; TILMAN, Samuel, *Les grands banquiers belges (1830-1935). Portrait collectif d’une élite*, Brussels, 2006.

²⁹ See OTTE, Thomas “‘Outdoor Relief for the Aristocracy’? European Nobility and Diplomacy, 1850-1914”, in MÖSSLANG and RIOTTE (eds.), *The Diplomats' World*, 24.

³⁰ See especially URBACH, Karina (ed.), *European Aristocracies and the Radical Right, 1918-1939*, Oxford, 2007.

professionalize their practices, while on the other they realized that speaking *for* the people increasingly equalled speaking *like* the people.³¹

The Conceptual Mess

The present thesis investigates how these structural changes influenced the agents who represented the nation *across* the borders. Although it adopts a resolutely empirical and narrativist approach, considerable theoretical reflections have preceded the creation of my story of Belgian diplomats in times of democratization.³² Its underlying conceptual framework is not visible throughout the text but rather functioned as a searchlight to find and organize the materials for the construction of this study's narrative. It starts from the assumption that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, processes of democratization caused a significant shift in international political culture, which in turn led to an evolution of diplomatic culture. With 'democratization', 'international political culture' and 'diplomatic culture', the previous sentence contains several "sponge words", or words that "can soak up a variety of operational meanings but at some saturation point begin to leave a logical and functional mess behind."³³ To avoid this from happening, these concepts need to be rendered suitable for historical research.

In 1991, Samuel Huntington challenged contemporary scholarship on democratic transition theories with a macro-historical study identifying three successive 'waves of democratization' that inundated the world from the early nineteenth century onwards. In his opinion, such waves surge with a considerable net increase in the number of democracies.³⁴ Huntington's views were reassessed as to the chronological demarcation of the waves and the (dis)continuity of the processes.³⁵ Nevertheless, with regards to Europe in the early twentieth century, a consensus seems to exist that democratization loomed largely from at least the 1890s to the early 1920s, encountered serious setbacks until the end of the Second World War, and resurfaced vigorously from the late 1940s onwards.

³¹ See for instance JOANA, Jean *Pratiques politiques des députés français au XIXe siècle. Du dilettante au spécialiste*, Paris, 1999; PHÉLIPPEAU, Éric, *L'Invention de l'homme politique moderne. Mackau, l'Orne et la République*, Paris, 2002; LAWRENCE, Jon, *Speaking for the people: party, language and popular politics in England, 1867-1914*, Cambridge, 1998; SCHWARZ, Bill, "Politics and Rhetoric in the Age of Mass Culture", *History Workshop Journal*, 46, 1998, 129-159.

³² See AUWERS, Michael, "Grasping the Mental World of Diplomacy in the Late Modern Era: A Conceptual Framework", *Annals of the Ovidius University Constanta - History Series*, 8, 2011, 139-159.

³³ DER DERIAN, James, *On Diplomacy. A Genealogy of Western Estrangement*, Oxford, 1987, 31.

³⁴ HUNTINGTON, Samuel P., *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, 1991.

³⁵ See KURZMAN, Charles, "Waves of Democratization", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 33/1, 1998, 42-64; and BERMAN, Sheri, "How Democracies Emerge. Lessons from Europe", *Journal of Democracy*, 18/1, 2007, 28-41.

Huntington adopted a chronologically altering notion of democracy: while in the nineteenth century, requirements included periodically organized, free elections, and voting eligibility for at least half of the adult male population, a century later political systems could only be considered democracies if they had extended the franchise to “virtually all the adult population” and respected civil liberties.³⁶ This apparent lack of consistency has led other political scientists to criticize the vision of Huntington.³⁷ However, throughout history, democracy has always been a concept subject to change. Studying the use of the term in Dutch political discourse over the last two centuries, Henk te Velde found that until 1870, virtually no parliamentarian would have prided himself as a ‘democrat’, ‘democracy’ being equalled with demagoguery. Only from the 1890s onwards, left-wing parliamentarians started to frequently use the word to indicate the equality they wanted to achieve via franchise extensions. Once universal male franchise was established after the First World War and all citizens had obtained equal political rights, gradually liberty became more important as a facet of democracy. This evolution was spurred by the battle against fascism in the late 1930s and early 1940s.³⁸ Although the concept of democracy originally had a much more positive connotation in Belgian parliament, precisely because the idea of popular sovereignty lay at the very core of the political system, a similar evolution seems to have taken place in Belgium.³⁹ In the 1870s, the Proceedings of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives noted only a little over forty mentions of ‘démocratie’. By the 1890s, this amount had increased more than twelvefold. To a large extent, this was due to the entry of social democrats in parliament after the introduction of the plural male voting right in 1893. Social democrats were the most ardent advocates of democracy, equated by them with sovereignty of the people. They therefore strived for a one man, one vote system. The introduction of universal single male suffrage in 1919 did not dwindle parliamentary interest in the concept of democracy, quite the contrary. In the interwar years, the term was referred to ever more often, reaching an absolute high in 1933, the year of Adolf Hitler’s advent to power. As in the Netherlands at about the

³⁶ HUNTINGTON, *The Third Wave*, 5-26 (especially 7 and 15).

³⁷ See for instance DOORENSPLEET, Renske, “Reassessing the Three Waves of Democratization”, *World Politics*, 52, 2000, 384-406.

³⁸ TE VELDE, Henk, “De domesticatie van democratie in Nederland. Democratie als strijdbegrip van de negentiende eeuw tot 1945”, *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 127/2, 2012, 3-27. See also ANDERSON, Margaret L., *Practicing democracy: elections and political culture in imperial Germany*, Princeton, 2000.

³⁹ BEYEN, Marnix and Henk TE VELDE, “Modern parliaments in the Low Countries”, in Pasi IHALAINEN, Cornelia ILIE and Paul SEAWARD (eds.), *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of Disputes on a European Concept*, New York, (forthcoming in) 2014.

same time, Belgian parliamentary understanding of democracy had begun to underscore the notion's dimension of civil liberties.⁴⁰

Within the social sciences, the 'transition' perspective to democratization adopted by Huntington currently competes with a 'modernization' approach on the one hand, and with a 'structural' view on the other hand. While the former sees democratization as spurred by socioeconomic requisites such as extent of industrialization and degree of urbanization, the latter emphasizes changing structures of class, state and transnational power.⁴¹ Apart from the transition approach, which acknowledges the role of political elites in moving a political system towards democracy, these theories devote little attention to human agency. Particularly the role of 'the people' has been ignored. Yet, a few authors have objected that civil society in general, and mass attitudes in particular, most notably liberty aspirations of the masses, operate as key driving forces behind democratization. This is an important point of view in that it underscores the cultural dimension that these processes inevitably harbour.⁴²

Few political historians have undertaken efforts to conceptualize democratization. Those who have, favour a transition approach to the phenomenon. They also seem to recognize both the agency of the people and the importance of mass aspirations. On the one hand, Tuija Pulkkinen and José Maria Rosales view democratization as a set of interacting strategies and procedures that have changed the conditions of political action and debate.⁴³ This description harbours both the perspective of the people and that of the political elite, or in the words of Marnix Beyen, both the sociological and political-institutional points of view. The former comprises all kinds of evolutions that extend the leverage for social mobility to ever larger groups of people, while at the same time granting them access to diverse

⁴⁰ Information about the recurrence of the term 'démocratie' is drawn from the website www.plenum.be. This website contains digital versions of the Proceedings of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives. See BEELEN, Kaspar, Thomas CROMBEZ and Marnix BEYEN, "Plenum.be: een digitale ontsluiting van de Parlementaire Handelingen (1844-1999)", *Mededelingenblad van de Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 34/2, 2012, 37-43. See also STENGERS, Jean, "Histoire de la législation électorale en Belgique" in NOIRET, S. (ed.), *Political Strategies and Electoral Reforms: Origins of Voting Systems in Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Stratégies politiques et réformes électorales: aux origines des modes de scrutiny en Europe aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, Baden-Baden, 1990, 76-107; and LUYTEN, Dirk and Paul MAGNETTE, "Het parlementarisme", in Emmanuel GÉRARD, et. al. (eds.), *Geschiedenis van de Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1830-2002*, Brussels, 2003, 26-33.

⁴¹ POTTER, David "Explaining Democratization", in David POTTER et al. (eds.), *Democratization*, Cambridge, 1997, 1-40.

⁴² WELZEL, Christian, "Democratization as an emancipative process: the neglected role of mass motivations", *European Journal of Political Research*, 45, 2006, 871-896 (at 871); GILL, Graeme, *The Dynamics of Democratization. Elites, Civil Society and the Transition Process*, Basingstoke, 2000. See also BERG-SCHLOSSER, Dirk, "Introduction", in Dirk BERG-SCHLOSSER (ed.), *Democratization. The State of the Art*, Opladen, 2007, 16.

⁴³ PULKKINEN, Tuija and José Maria ROSALES, "Introduction. On the Politics, Concepts, and Histories of European Democratization", in Kari PALONEN, Tuija PULKKINEN and José Maria ROSALES (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Politics of Democratization in Europe*, Farnham, 2008, 1-2.

communication circuits. The political-institutional perspective on democratization involves the decisions of governments to engage these increasing numbers of people in policy-making.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Pulkkinen and Rosales find most intriguing the ability of the concept “to express the expectations for democratic change.”⁴⁵ This cultural dimension of democratization seems to spring from the interplay between its political-institutional and sociological perspectives. When political elites in the late nineteenth century, often under pressure from street protests, petitions and press campaigns, extended the franchise, created conditions favourable to the rise of the mass media, or invested in education, larger parts of the population gained a fuller membership of the political community. As a result, the outlooks of representative governments changed. More than before, political parties indeed set themselves up as mouthpieces of particular segments of the population. To use Bernard Manin’s terminology, ‘party democracy’ came to replace the older system of ‘parliamentarianism’. On the one hand, this meant that in parliament, the traditional ruling elite of notables had to put up with the presence of ever more party activists sprung from larger sections of the population. They also had to endure the harshening of discussions, as individual representatives progressively toed the party line and parliament became an arena of conflicts between clashing party ideologies. On the other hand, mass parties increasingly dominated community life and monopolised press circulation, thus structuring expressions of public opinion along partisan cleavages. As such, they were highly effective in reflecting the divided political preferences of the growing number of voters. These people increasingly identified with party mandatories, whose social positions and world views often resembled their own. Not surprisingly, this spurred the conviction that representative government was moving toward democracy.⁴⁶

In other words, the evolution from parliamentarianism to party democracy generated a political culture of expectation that the sovereignty over political decision-making would come to reside truly with the people. Almost a century earlier, similar expectations had driven parts of the French population to push for the transition from “dynastically legitimated monarchical sovereignty” to “popularly legitimated national sovereignty”.⁴⁷ Initially, these hopes seemed to materialize, both on domestic and international political levels. French

⁴⁴ BEYEN, Marnix, “Inleiding: natievorming en democratie in een West-Europees perspectief”, *Natie en democratie, 1890-1921: acta van het interuniversitair colloquium, Brussel, 8-9 juni 2006* = *Nation et démocratie, 1890-1921: actes du colloque interuniversitaire, Bruxelles, 8-9 juin 2006*, Brussels, 2008, pp. 373-375.

⁴⁵ PULKKINEN and ROSALES, “Introduction”, 2.

⁴⁶ MANIN, Bernard, *The principles of representative government*, Cambridge, 1997, 193-218.

⁴⁷ BUKOVANSKY, Mlada *Legitimacy and power politics: the American and French revolutions in international political culture*, Princeton, 2002, 1.

Revolutionaries did not only want to eliminate all reminders of the *ancien regime* within France, they also aimed at revolutionizing diplomatic practice by replacing the secret machinations between kings with open negotiations between peoples.⁴⁸ Along with the rise of the party political system in the last decades of the nineteenth century, most Western European countries witnessed similar claims for popular sovereignty in foreign policy making. These were brought to the international arena by peace movements, which counted among its members numerous left-wing parliamentarians and publicists who believed war could only be avoided if true representatives of the people conducted international relations in public.⁴⁹ While franchise extensions and the rise of the mass media had enabled these persons to more effectively influence public opinion, they had to reckon with a more powerful political elite inclined to preserve the balance of power among European states. In foreign policy making, this elite did not object to warfare and preferred the discretion of professional diplomats.⁵⁰ Before 1914, both advocates and opponents of traditional diplomacy had a considerable share in shaping international political culture.

This concept was coined in the late 1970s by Hedley Bull, one of the founding fathers of the *English School* or *International Society* approach in IR Theory.⁵¹ Bull and his colleagues view international politics as more than just relations between abstract states. In their opinion, states form a society that – like national societies – is guided by rules and norms. An anthropological notion of culture, as constantly evolving modes of thoughts, patterns of behaviour, and preferred norms and values, operates as this society's supporting idea.⁵² In Bull's vision, culture is essential to the normative cohesion of international society, because it effectively pervades all three of international society's interrelated levels. Culture in the works of Bull could be represented as three concentric circles: the outer circle of 'world' culture refers to international society as a whole, and encompasses the cultures of the intermediate rank of the states (international political culture) and of the sublevel of states' foreign representatives (diplomatic culture).⁵³ Bull defines international political culture as

⁴⁸ FREY, Linda and Marsha FREY, " 'The Reign of the Charlatans is Over': The French Revolutionary Attack on Diplomatic Practice", *Journal of Modern History*, 65/4, 1993, 706-744.

⁴⁹ See CEADEL, Martin, *Semi-detached Idealists: the British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945*, Oxford, 2000.

⁵⁰ RIEMENS, Michael, *De passie voor vrede: de evolutie van de internationale politieke cultuur in de jaren 1880-1940 en het recipiëren door Nederland*, Amsterdam, 2005, 47-93.

⁵¹ See DUNNE, Tim, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School*, London, 1998.

⁵² REEVES, Julie, *Culture and International Relations. Narratives, Natives and Tourists*, London, 2004, 112.

⁵³ REEVES, *Culture and International Relations*, 120-127; O'HAGAN, Jacinta, "The Question of Culture", in Alex J. BELLAMY (ed.), *International Society and its Critics*, Oxford, 2005, 211-212; DER DERIAN, James, "Hedley Bull and the idea of diplomatic culture", in Rick FAWN (ed.), *International Society after the Cold War*, London, 1996, 87-88.

“the intellectual and moral culture that determines the attitudes towards the states system of the societies that compose it.”⁵⁴

This definition does not allow for any significant differentiation to be made between collective agents (societies) and individual conscious agents (members of societies). As a consequence, it does not allow either to shed light on the historically vital behaviours and self-understandings of particular agents in specific intellectual and political contexts.⁵⁵ To increase its practicability, the concept of international political culture requires at least some division into identifiable agents (or mouthpieces). Even more so if one would want to grasp how these (groups of) agents interacted with (members of) the diplomatic corps throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Dutch historian Michael Riemens has heeded the call by providing a detailed categorization of the multitude of agents that constitute society. Studying the evolution of international political culture between 1880 and 1940, Riemens claims that “international political culture is styled by state and government leaders, rivals of those leaders from home and abroad, civil servants with advisory and executive functions, public political discourse, the media, the public opinion of the society in whose service the government has placed itself and representatives of international organizations and institutions”.⁵⁶ Surely, Riemens’s fragmentation of the producers of international political culture might seem a little excessive, especially considering the methodological problems to identify the particular agency of each one of these producers. Moreover, international political culture does not operate in a vacuum but functions in dialogical interaction with, to give just one example, the ideas and practices of members of the diplomatic corps.

Another problem with Riemens’s conceptualization is that he lists domestic public opinion as one among many producers of international political culture but does not explain how this amorphous and slippery concept actually contributes to shaping international

⁵⁴ BULL, Hedley, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics*, Basingstoke, 1995, 304. Echoes of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s influential notion of political culture resound clearly in this definition. Almond and Verba termed (the) political culture (of a nation) as “the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation”. *Political objects* comprise all kinds of political bodies, political persons and political decisions, the whole ‘system of the state’, so to speak, while *patterns of orientation* bear a great deal of resemblance to ‘attitudes’ and the *members of the nation*, of course, form that nation’s ‘society’. See ALMOND, Gabriel A. and Sidney VERBA, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Boston, 1965, 13-14.

⁵⁵ The same goes for Mlada Bukovansky’s understanding of international political culture. To interpret historical shifts in international political culture, Bukovansky feels the phenomenon should be studied as “a system of rules about political authority ... held by a society at any given time”. See BUKOVANSKY, *Legitimacy and Power Politics*, 22 and 60. See also BELL, Duncan S., “Remaking Anarchy. Review of Mlada Bukovansky: *Legitimacy and power politics...*”, *The Review of Politics*, 65/ 3, 2003, 476-478.

⁵⁶ RIEMENS, *De passie voor vrede*, 31-38 at 32.

political culture. Very susceptible to elite manipulation, the formation of the true opinion of the public can only be approximated, as Jürgen Habermas has claimed. Yet this awareness did not refrain Habermas from suggesting a more pragmatic concept of public opinion as “the views held by those who join in rational-critical debate on an issue.”⁵⁷ In a way, Habermas thus rephrased Herbert Blumer’s argument that “in any realistic sense public opinion consists of the pattern of the diverse views and positions on the issue that come to the individuals who have to act in response to public opinion”.⁵⁸ So Blumer is basically saying that public opinion is formed by effectively expressed views that reach and affect their subjects, who in the context of his research are politicians.

In the early twentieth century and with regard to public opinion on the members of the diplomatic corps, these were views voiced by elites, most notably by parliamentarians and publicists/journalists. Processes of democratization certainly influenced the representativeness and diversity of these views. For one, franchise extensions widened the social composition of parliament and gave a voice to larger sections of the public. For another, newspapers increasingly became a means to address a radicalizing public. As Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte have argued, “perceptions of the mass media were closely connected with the emergence of democracy and the threat it potentially posed to the established order.”⁵⁹ Diplomats, while belonging to the established order, also formed part of society and thus of public opinion. As such, they too could be seen as producers of international political culture. They interacted dynamically and dialogically with their social, cultural, and political environments. More specifically, one would expect them to acknowledge and react – directly or indirectly – to criticisms uttered in parliament and published in the press.

Elaborating upon the insights of Habermas and Blumer, Daniel Hucker has recently argued that the impact of public opinion on the conduct of international relations can only be grasped “inasmuch as public opinion was *perceived* by the decision-making elites, and that these perceptions can best be understood via a notion of *representations*.” Hucker distinguishes between ‘residual’ and ‘reactive’ representations of public opinion. Adapting Hucker’s theory to the purpose of this study, the former refer to the representations that the subjects of public opinion – diplomats in this case – created intuitively, based on their past experiences. In other words, residual representations of public opinion on diplomacy are those

⁵⁷ Jürgen Habermas quoted in HUCKER, Daniel, “International History and the Study of Public Opinion: Towards Methodological Clarity”, *The International History Review*, 34/4, 2012, 783.

⁵⁸ BLUMER, Herbert “Public opinion and public opinion polling”, *American Sociological Review*, 13/5, 1948, 545.

⁵⁹ MÖSSLANG and RIOTTE, *The Diplomats' World*, 5.

representations that diplomats made of this opinion on diplomacy before it was actually expressed. These representations can mostly be found in ego-documents of diplomats such as private correspondence and diaries, where their authors sometimes tended to comment on the workings of press and parliament. Conversely, ‘reactive’ representations of public opinion refer to the more recognisable manifestations of public opinion. These are the representations printed in sources such as newspapers and parliamentary debates but also those written down in personal letters and diaries of diplomats, for instance when they commented on articles published in the press. By analysing the interplay between the ‘residual’ and ‘reactive’ representations of public opinion, one could trace how the diplomats’ perceptions of public opinion on diplomacy (and on diplomats themselves) altered over time.⁶⁰ Hence the elaborate attention devoted in this study to not only parliamentary debates and newspaper articles, which contain ‘reactive’ representations of public opinion, but also to private correspondence and diaries of diplomats, which contain both ‘reactive’ and ‘residual’ representations.⁶¹

A practical notion of diplomatic culture could help to effectively analyse the stances that diplomats took in societal debates about diplomacy. Bull coined diplomatic culture as “the common stock of ideas and values possessed by the official representatives of states”. He considered diplomatic culture to be an integrated part of international political culture, the official representatives of states being members of national societies as well. Furthermore, the set of ideas and values shared by this cosmopolitan elite of diplomats constituted a fundamental factor in the preservation of international order and hence in the future of international society. Bull suggested that the diplomatic and international political cultures sustaining (European) international society in the centuries before the First World War, were much stronger than the ones at his time of writing in the Cold War period. This could be explained both by the rather superficial foundations of diplomatic culture in contemporary

⁶⁰ HUCKER, “International History and the Study of Public Opinion”, 775-794 (especially 784-789). On ego-documents and their use for historical research, see the essays in AERTS, Remieg, Janny DE JONG and Henk TE VELDE (eds.), *Het persoonlijke is politiek. Egodocumenten en politieke cultuur*, Hilversum, 2002. See also FULBROOK, Mary, and Ulinka RUBLACK, “In Relation: The ‘Social Self’ and Ego-Documents”, *German History*, 28/3, 2010, 263-272.

⁶¹ Recently, not only the Proceedings of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives but also several dozens of Belgian newspapers published before 1970 have been converted into computer-readable text via Optical Character Recognition (OCR). See “Gids doorheen de gedigitaliseerde kranten – gebruikershandleiding”, Website of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België. < <http://belgica.kbr.be/pdf/jour/gebruikersHandleiding.pdf> >, consulted on 4 February 2014. The Proceedings of the Belgian Senate can be found on < http://www.senate.be/www/?MIval=/index_senate&MENUID=24400&LANG=nl >. These documents have not been converted into computer-readable text via OCR.

national societies, and by the lack of an international political culture that powerfully reinforced diplomatic culture.⁶²

The idea of diplomatic culture did not seem particularly relevant to many scholars working in the 1970s and 1980s, when international relations appeared to be dominated by clashing ideologies.⁶³ But after the end of the Cold War, and especially in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, issues of culture in international relations received fresh attention.⁶⁴ Several English School IR theorists started elaborating upon Bull's definition of diplomatic culture, deepening our understanding of the shared norms and worldviews grown out of the encounters within a transnational epistemic community of diplomatic participants.⁶⁵ This is not to say that scholars in this field completely ignore the national dimension in diplomatic culture. They do recognize diplomacy's position on the bridge between national and international politics, as well as the diplomats' double mandate as representatives of both individual states and international society.⁶⁶ However, so far they have paid little attention to the national/domestic element in their empirical studies, which has sometimes led them to wrongfully downplay the relative weight of this dimension in diplomatic culture. In her analysis of the diplomatic corps from the mid-seventeenth century until the present day (but which focuses on the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries), Mai'a Davis Cross even goes as far as to claim that the uniqueness of the diplomatic corps as an epistemic community lies partly in the fact that diplomats "are not subject to domestic pressures or to public opinion."⁶⁷

Within the wider academic field of IR studies, the concept of diplomatic culture has lost much of its prestige over the past few years. Part of the explanation certainly lies in the nationalist backlash that has been looming large in contemporary international politics. As a former ambassador and current professor of diplomacy has convincingly argued, in the realm of diplomacy institutional differences between countries and national political realism have

⁶² BULL, *The Anarchical Society*, 304-305; O'HAGAN, "The Question of Culture", 212.

⁶³ A notable exception is DER DERIAN, *On diplomacy*, 30-43.

⁶⁴ COHEN, Raymond, *Negotiating across Cultures: International Communication in an Interdependent World*, Washington, 2002, 3; O'HAGAN, "The Question of Culture", 209-210; GRAM-SKJOLDAGER, "Never Talk to Strangers?", 3.

⁶⁵ See the essays of Dietrich Kappeler, Paul Sharp, Kishan S. Rana and Wynne Elizabeth Russel, in SLAVIK, Hannah (ed.), *Intercultural communication and diplomacy*, Malta, 2004, 353-402; SOFER, Sasson, "The Diplomatic Corps as a Symbol of Diplomatic Culture", *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society*, Basingstoke, 2007, 31-38; DAVIS CROSS, Mai'a K., *The European Diplomatic Corps. Diplomats and International Cooperation from Westphalia to Maastricht*, Basingstoke, 2007; WISEMAN, Geoffrey, "Pax Americana: bumping into diplomatic culture", *International Studies Perspectives*, 6/4, 2005, 409-430. See also NEUMANN, Iver B., *The English School on Diplomacy*, Discussion Papers in Diplomacy, Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2002, 23.

⁶⁶ GRAM-SKJOLDAGER, "Never Talk to Strangers?", 6; SHARP, Paul, "The Idea of Diplomatic Culture and Its Sources", in SLAVIK, *Intercultural communication*, 361-379.

⁶⁷ DAVIS CROSS, *The European Diplomatic Corps*, 27.

created distinctive cultural characteristics that easily supersede transnational ones.⁶⁸ This means that to historically interpret diplomatic culture in an effective manner, a concept is required that allows reconciling the national and transnational dimensions of the phenomenon.

Historians have built up a substantial bit of expertise in dealing with history from the nation state perspective. Professional historiography indeed evolved in a close relationship with the nation-state and is organized accordingly. Despite the rising prominence of trans- and supranational subjects, current historiography still finds it difficult to break with the nation as frame.⁶⁹ This definitely applies to the field of International History, which has long been guided by the predominance of political realist thinking in policy making, the centrality of the state and the existence of anarchy in international society.⁷⁰ Remarkably enough, in the historical works that adopt the concept of diplomatic culture, the national perspective is not predominant. On the contrary, most historians tend to view diplomatic culture as the Saussurian *langue* of a network of diplomatic actors from various European regions but who share common beliefs and mentalities.⁷¹

It should be mentioned that in most of these works, efforts to conceptualize diplomatic culture are either lacking or hardly substantiated. However, exceptions do exist. Starting from *English School* theories, Mösslang and Riotte have pleaded that diplomatic culture should “include all aspects of diplomatic practice”, or “a multitude of analytical categories” like “norms and perceptions, official and private capacities, class and origin, or religion and race”. These “had to be constantly renegotiated”.⁷² Peter Van Kemseke, too, willingly admits to be highly influenced by the insights of Hedley Bull and his followers. He agrees with Bull that diplomatic culture forms integrated part of international political culture, but also turns to the anthropological insights of Clifford Geertz. This leads him to propose an interpretation of diplomatic culture as “a historically grown, enduring aggregate of ideas, traditions, and norms

⁶⁸ BOLEWSKI, Wilfried, *Diplomacy and International Law in Globalized Relations*, Berlin, 2007, 77.

⁶⁹ BREUILLY, John, “Nationalism and Historians. Some Reflections. The Formation of National(ist) Historiographical Discourse”, in Claire NORTON (ed.), *Nationalism, Historiography and the (Re)Construction of the Past*, Washington, 2007, 16-19.

⁷⁰ GRAM-SKJOLDAGER, “Never Talk to Strangers”, 4-5 and 11-12.

⁷¹ OSBORNE, Toby, *Dynasty and diplomacy in the court of Savoy: political culture and the Thirty Year’s War*, Cambridge, 2002; SCOTT, Hamish, “Diplomatic culture in old regime Europe”, in Hamish SCOTT and Brendan SIMMS (eds.), *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, 2007, 58-85; KIESSLING, Friedrich, “Self-Perception, the Official Attitude Toward Pacifism, and Great Power Détente. Reflections on Diplomatic Culture before World War I”, in Jessica C. E. GIENOW-HECHT (ed.), *Decentering America*, New York, 2007, 346-366. For an analysis of a dialogue between national and transnational diplomatic cultures, see KOCHO-WILLIAMS, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy*. Some historians do limit their scope to the culture of one foreign ministry and its diplomats. See AUSLIN, Michael R., *Negotiating with Imperialism. The unequal treaties and the culture of Japanese diplomacy*, Cambridge, 2004; and MORI, *The Culture of Diplomacy*.

⁷² MÖSSLANG, Markus and Torsten RIOTTE, “Introduction”, in MÖSSLANG and RIOTTE, *The Diplomats’ World*, 8-9.

disseminated by diplomats practising their professional activities”, and that “consists in all kinds of procedures, carefully created myths, rituals and symbols that sometimes have to be discovered and decoded.”⁷³ Interestingly, both Mösslang & Riotte and Van Kemseke have introduced a ‘negotiating perspective’ in the notion of diplomatic culture, which allows to investigate the dynamic interaction between diplomats and their structural environments. Van Kemseke categorizes four mutually affecting tendencies which eventually “put an end to the closed, aristocratic character of the diplomatic profession once and for all”. He identifies them as democratisation, mediatisation, professionalization and traditional diplomacy’s shift away from the centre of world politics, while also stating that “material changes and changes in international political culture transform the diplomatic profession, and eventually, diplomatic culture too.” Mösslang & Riotte tell a very similar story, but list both technological innovations and political and social changes under the heading of modernity.⁷⁴

While acknowledging the interconnectedness of these developments, this study pays very little attention to the material innovations, focusing instead on the social-political evolutions that influenced diplomatic culture.⁷⁵ It recurs to a concept of democratization that harbours all four of the tendencies that Van Kemseke sees at work in the late modern era. With regards to diplomatic culture, this study accepts the values of previous conceptualizations but primarily approaches the phenomenon as a specialized form of political culture. More specifically, it rephrases the definition posited by Glen Gendzel in his seminal 1996 article “Political Culture: Genealogy of a Concept”. Diplomatic culture, then, is the structure of meaning through which members of the diplomatic corps develop ideas, perceive interests, and act on both.⁷⁶

This conceptualization points to the three main points of attention in the present thesis. First, diplomatic culture was, as it is now, essentially an elite culture.⁷⁷ It refers to the members of the diplomatic corps, which form an easily identifiable social-professional group that very clearly embodies both the national and transnational dimensions of diplomatic culture. Persons belonging to elite groups tend to establish all kinds of social markers to distinguish themselves not only from other social groups but also from other members of the

⁷³ VAN KEMSEKE, Peter, “Inleiding. Diplomatie: Een kwestie van cultuur”, in Peter VAN KEMSEKE (ed.), *Diplomatieke cultuur*, Leuven, 2000, 10-11.

⁷⁴ VAN KEMSEKE, “Inleiding”, 11 and 27-34; MÖSSLANG and RIOTTE, “Introduction”, 1 and 4-7.

⁷⁵ On the influence of technological changes on diplomatic culture, see NICKLES, David Paull, *Under the Wire: How the Telegraph Changed Diplomacy*, Cambridge (MA), 2003.

⁷⁶ See GENDZEL, Glenn, “Political Culture: Genealogy of a Concept”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 28, 1997, 249.

⁷⁷ See BORITZ, Mette, “The Hidden Culture in Diplomatic Practice. A Study of the Danish Foreign Service”, *Ethnologia Scandinavica*, 28, 1998, 48-61.

same elite group. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully establish the social and professional identities of the various Belgian diplomats. Thorough prosopographic research is also needed to reveal how the social stratification of the Belgian diplomatic corps evolved under the influence of democratization.⁷⁸

Second, with regard to the diplomat's ideas and perception of interests, an intellectual history of the diplomatic corps can reveal to what extent the shifting social composition of diplomatic communities as well as the changing international political culture, influenced the diplomats' professional world views. This means enquiring into the discourses of this elite social group: it entails considering elements of self-representation, perception of political processes and its actors, as well as the diplomats' various loyalties. In constructing a conceptual framework for understanding the entanglement of domestic politics and international relations, Robert Putnam has aptly characterized diplomacy as a two-level game. Putnam highlights national political leaders as the players of this game. At the national level, they have to reconcile different domestic groups that each try to impose their own view on foreign policy issues. At the international level, they have to ably defend the resulting compromise and minimize the negative outcomes that foreign developments could have for their country.⁷⁹ In a similar way, studying the history of professional diplomats from a social-cultural perspective requires coming to terms with the reality of diplomacy as a two-level-game. The diplomatic agent, being an employee of his home country's Foreign Office, is a part of his domestic society as much as he is a member of the international diplomatic community. These different identities imply that various intertwined structures of meaning shape his ideas and condition the perception of his interests: the most important are the culture of his Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is at least partly conditioned by a more general national political culture, and the cultures of the diplomatic communities in their host countries, which, again, are partly determined by these foreign countries political cultures.

⁷⁸ Throughout the 19th and twentieth centuries, most Western countries have issued 'diplomatic annuals' containing lists of the members of their national diplomatic corps. The Belgian government started doing this in 1901, see *ADCB = Annuaire diplomatique et consulaire* (later *Annuaire du corps diplomatique*), Belgium. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brussels, 1901-present. For the previous period, this information can be drawn from *AR = Almanach royal officiel publié depuis 1840 en exécution de l'arrêté royal du 14 octobre 1839*, Brussels, 1840-1939. To study the development of the share of nobles (and the noble seniority of these persons) in the Belgian diplomatic corps, data found in these works can easily be cross-checked with *EPNB = COOMANS DE BRACHÈNE*, Oscar, *Etat présent de la noblesse belge : annuaire*, third series, Brussels, 1984-2002; and with *DUERLOO*, Luc, and Paul *JANSSENS*, *Wapenboek van de Belgische adel: van de 15de tot de 20ste eeuw*, 4 vols., Brussels, 1992-1994.

⁷⁹ PUTNAM, Robert, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games", *International Organization*, 42/3, 1988, 42, 427-460.

Third, to reveal the action counterpart of these ideas and interest perceptions, namely the diplomats' professional behaviour, a social anthropology of diplomacy is necessary to determine to what extent the processes of democratization influenced or even changed the diplomats' activities as a public servant. Here too the aforementioned intertwined structures of meaning are at work. The diplomats can be studied as careerists in an hierarchically structured Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and as members of the international diplomatic community who are executing national foreign policy. In their actions, diplomats manifest their loyalties. Political scientists have identified several institutions (the national Foreign Ministries and their leaders, the transnational diplomatic community, and the political leadership in their host countries) that diplomats pledge allegiance to and have theorized on the internal conflicts that could arise from this.⁸⁰

Although the present study acknowledges the tension between the national and transnational identities of Belgian diplomats, its focus lies with the former. Issues relating to the dealings of Belgian diplomats with foreign colleagues, foreign political leaders, and foreign journalists will receive only secondary attention. Conversely, their interactions with Belgian colleagues, Belgian political leaders, and Belgian journalists are at the core of this study. In a study of times when nationalism was one of democratization's most expressive faces, this does not exclude investigating how the national identities of diplomats came under increasing pressure from voices who denied these identities, arguing that diplomats were no nationals but mere cosmopolitans.

Cultural approaches to Diplomatic History have often been criticized for their ignorance of the dynamic relationship between cultural predispositions and the structural environment in which they exist. In the present study, this flaw is overcome by a concept of diplomatic culture that focuses on human practice, and thus on the dialogue of ideas, beliefs and identities of diplomats with the structural environment in which action takes place.⁸¹ Introducing such an agent-structure perspective into the history of the interaction between democratization and diplomatic culture evokes a number of questions about social transformations. For one, did democratization change the structures of diplomatic practice, i.e. the body of ideas about the execution of diplomacy and the division, among the actors in the diplomatic field, of the available resources to change that field or to resist such changes? According to the traditional narrative, democratization related processes like franchise

⁸⁰ GALTUNG, Johan and Mari HOLMBOE RUGE, "Patterns of Diplomacy: A Study of Recruitment and Career Patterns in Norwegian Diplomacy", *Journal of Peace Research*, 2/2, 1965, 112; DAVIS CROSS, *The European Diplomatic Corps*, 24; SOFER, "The Diplomatic Corps", 36.

⁸¹ JACKSON, "Pierre Bourdieu", 156-160.

extensions and the rise of the mass media indeed contributed to taking foreign policy making away from Royal Palaces and Foreign Offices, and placed it into the hands of democratically elected politicians who were possibly susceptible to opinions expressed in newspapers. For another, how did diplomats, as agents, react to these changing structures? Or in other words: how did these changing structures affect diplomatic culture, i.e. the way diplomats developed ideas (e.g. about their societal role as foreign policy executives), the way they perceived interests (for instance regarding their professional future as organizational reforms instigated by politicians possibly under the influence of journalists might have altered career advancement opportunities), and lastly, the way they acted on these ideas and interests? Finally, if we acknowledge that, through their practices, agents can affect and ultimately transform structures, then did, and if so, how did the diplomats' reactions to processes of democratization influence or even alter the schemas of thought about diplomacy one more time?⁸² Since, as I mentioned in the beginning of this introduction, Henri Davignon saw the diplomat as a communicator and an arbitrator limited in his manoeuvring space by rules imposed by a changing professional environment, such an approach might well have pleased him.

The Island and the Storm

The answers to the above questions are structured in the three parts, eleven chapters, and epilogue that constitute this study. Sporadically in the text, but mostly in the conclusions of each chapter, I have used the metaphor of Diplomatic Island to describe the mental world of Belgian diplomats and the changes that it underwent. Partly, this metaphor is inspired by a selective reading of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory. Luhmann emphasizes that 'systems' (in this case the diplomat's world) are defined by a boundary between themselves and their environment. While these environments are complex, chaotic, and always changing, systems are zones of reduced complexity with a distinctive identity which is continuously reproduced in interaction with their environments.⁸³ In the decades before the First World War, the diplomatic system seemed to have changed very little because of the few communication lines

⁸² This approach is inspired by SEWELL, William H., Jr., *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago, 2005, 124-174.

⁸³ I have used the introduction to Luhmann edited by the Belgian sociologist Rudi Laermans, and more specifically LAERMANS, Rudi, "'De rest is zwijgen': Luhmanns visie op sociale systemen", in Rudi LAERMANS (ed.), *Sociale systemen bestaan. Een kennismaking met het werk van Niklas Luhmann*, Leuven, 1997, 19-35. Luhmann himself also used the metaphor of the island to describe social systems, calling them "Inseln geringerer Komplexität", or islands of reduced complexity, amidst an ever more complex environment. See LUHMANN, Niklas, *Soziologische Aufklärung. Aufsätze zur Theorie sozialer Systeme*, 1, Opladen, 1972, 116.

with the environment and the great distance that separated it from the environment. Hence the image of Diplomatic Island, separated by an ocean from the Mainland. Before going into the structure of the story of what happened on the island (and on the mainland) between 1885 and 1935, the island's geography needs some clarification. Diplomatic Island, as conceived in this study, was divided into different resorts, each of which belonged to one of the different states that constituted the Mainland. These resorts had different sizes and possessed different resources. Most of them were located in the most accessible, central regions of the island, while others covered rather inhospitable places. Nevertheless, an infrastructure of roads and waterways linked all resorts to each other. Moreover, all of them had access to the ocean via harbours. In theory, the ships steered by the governments of the Mainland's different states could use these harbours to visit Diplomatic Island. Like the other resorts, two buildings dominated the Belgian resort. One was what its inhabitants called the House, the place where diplomats received their training and their instructions and from where they were sent on the roads of Diplomatic Island to neighbouring or far-away resorts; the other was the Palace, which was the residence where the Ruler of the resort stayed when he was on the island. At least in theory, this Ruler indeed also ruled over the Belgian Mainland.

Part I looks into the conditions of living on Diplomatic Island in the decades before the First World War. Starting from the question what attracted young men to the island, the three chapters of this part recreate the social-cultural world of Belgian diplomats in the first period of substantial extensions of the country's civic democracy (1885-1914). Chapter One is conceived as a kind of snapshot of the island in this period and addresses issues such as financial gain and diplomatic sociability. The next chapters adopt a more diachronic perspective. Chapter Two offers a sociological-institutional view of life on Diplomatic Island. Focusing on the formal and informal rules that regulated access to and traffic on the island, it reveals how the social group that lived or wished to live on the island dealt with these rules. This chapter essentially discusses diplomatic career paths and the prestige they could lead to. The final chapter of Part I studies how social and political developments on the Mainland affected the ways that the inhabitants and aspiring inhabitants of the Diplomatic Island judged the quality of life on both the Island and the Mainland. This is indeed the story of how Belgian diplomats perceived and interacted with the processes of democratization in their country around the turn of the twentieth century.

Part II investigates how people living on the Mainland looked at Diplomatic Island in the decades before 1914. It focuses on two groups which both claimed to represent the people's voice, namely parliamentarians and journalists. Chapter Four studies how members

of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives and Senate debated about the budget allocated for foreign affairs. At least partly, life on Diplomatic Island was indeed funded with money from the people on the Mainland. During annual discussions, which generally lasted only one or more sessions, parliamentarians expressed their ideas about what kind of people were living in the Belgian resort on the island, about what they were doing there, and about how they should do that. The same chapter also studies how the Foreign Minister, who was in charge of the House in that resort but often had to travel to the Mainland, reacted or neglected to react to these ideas after he had been enabled to do so by the House's inhabitants. Chapter Five investigates the same issues but from the perspective of Belgian journalists, who did not have to await annual budget discussions to utter their opinions about the inhabitants of Diplomatic Island, and about the ways these diplomats interacted with each other.

Part III starts with the advent of the Storm that from August 1914 onwards would rage over both Diplomatic Island and the Mainland. In six chronological chapters, it discusses how relations between the inhabitants of the island and exiles of the Mainland evolved under the circumstances of the First World War and in the years after this Storm had subsided. Chapter Six describes how the ship of the Belgian government, driven by the winds of the Storm, suddenly called in at the harbour of the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island. It focuses on the reactions of the Ruler and of the House's inhabitants after the Captain of that ship had made clear that he was there to stay and that he wished to give shelter on the island to some of his crew. The Ruler refers to the Belgian King Albert, while the Captain is the Cabinet Chief, or leader of the government, Baron Charles de Broqueville. Chapter Seven looks into the Ruler's countermove. Wishing to decide himself how dealings with the other resorts in these tensed times should transpire, he had indeed put one of the senior inhabitants of the House, the senior career diplomat Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, in charge of these dealings, thus thwarting the Captain's ambitions. Chapter Eight discusses how Beyens as the new head of the House dealt with his former peers, who because of the Storm had to adapt their ways of life. The functions of this career diplomat would come to an end before the Storm had subsided. The Captain had indeed managed to oust him and take his place. Chapter Nine reveals how the Captain dealt with representatives of the other resorts, with the inhabitants of the Belgian House, and with the Ruler of the Belgian resort. Unfortunately for the Captain, his stay in the House was of brief duration. Perhaps he had misjudged the rise to power of the junior inhabitants of the House, most notably of the functionary Albert de Bassompierre and the diplomat Pierre Orts. These men had found common ground with other politicians debarked from the Belgian government's ship and together they managed to send the Captain back to

his ship. One of these politicians, Paul Hymans, became the new head of the House. Chapter Ten scrutinizes how, in the last months of the Storm and during its aftermath, Hymans ruled over the Belgian resort with the aid of Orts and Bassompierre. It focuses partly on their relationship with the formal Ruler of the Belgian resort and mostly on how they dealt with representatives of the other states of the Mainland after the Storm had subsided. As the final chapter reveals, the Storm seemed to have brought the Mainland closer to Diplomatic Island. In any case, more than before the Storm journalists could be seen travelling the ocean in order to inform the people on the Mainland about what was happening on the island.

The metaphor of Diplomatic Island is absent from the Epilogue because these pages provide a much more selective overview of the interactions between democratization and diplomatic culture. They discuss the years from the early 1920s to the mid-1930s from the perspective of one single person, namely Baron Beyens, the senior career diplomat who in Chapters Seven and Eight held the functions of head of the House. The Epilogue concludes with a selective study of newspapers in the year after Beyens's death in early 1934. This will allow to hark back to the comments uttered the following year by Henri Davignon.

The critical reader might wonder why this story of Belgian diplomats in times of democratization ends in late 1935. I would argue that in 1936 a new phase in this history started and that the events of the next ten years alone suffice to fill another voluminous book. This decade started with a significant change in the direction of Belgian foreign policy, which would indirectly provoke a major conflict between the King and the government after the Second World War had erupted. This clash led many Belgian diplomats to experience conflicting loyalties, but under the influence of the doyen of the diplomatic corps, most of them chose to stand with the government in exile. Events turned to the advantage of the government and caused the indefinite elimination of the King as an actor in Belgian foreign policy making.⁸⁴ They also helped to bring about a fundamental reorganisation of the diplomatic career.⁸⁵ Diplomats from very different social backgrounds now faced the intensification of interwar international political developments, as old and new states engaged under the headings of multilateral organizations, while conference diplomacy in the form of summits became ever more institutionalized. However, their apparent further removal from the centre of world politics did not mean that diplomats could rest on their laurels: the increasing role of the state in everyday-life, extended their range of duties, too. A retired

⁸⁴ See VELAERS, Jan and Herman VAN GOETHEM, *Leopold III: de Koning, het Land, de Oorlog*, Tielt, 1994; and STENGERS, Jean, *Leopold III et le gouvernement: les deux politiques belges de 1940*, Paris, 1980.

⁸⁵ See ROOSENS, *Agents diplomatiques belges*, 44-46.

American diplomat rightly observed that, after 1945, the age of “total diplomacy” had dawned, and that “ambassadors can no longer be content with wining and dining, reporting, analysing and cautiously predicting.”⁸⁶ But let us first turn to times when this was still judged to exceed the ambitions of many Belgian diplomats.

⁸⁶ Chester B. Bowles quoted in HAMILTON and LANGHORNE, *The Practice of Diplomacy*, 183.

PART I
THE ISLAND OF DIPLOMACY. TO BECOME A DIPLOMAT BEFORE THE FIRST
WORLD WAR.

Sunday 23 April 1911 had been a warm and sunny day. That evening, twenty-five year old count André de Kerchove de Denterghem sat down at his writing table, and started to compose a letter to his beloved wife. Marguerite was the youngest daughter of Fernand Maskens, who held an influential position at the *Société Générale de Belgique*, the country's largest holding and investment company.⁸⁷ Young Kerchove could easily have stated his message verbally, as his wife and he were together under the roof of the majestic *Chateau de Beervelde*, a Tudor-style castle that the count's family had erected a few decades earlier. However, such a manner of proceeding would not have corresponded to the way a nobleman took important household decisions. Moreover, it did not allow for the intellectuality of both spouses to be deployed to the fullest in resolving the matter. The couple had been married only a year before, after André had enjoyed a foretaste of life in diplomacy as an attaché at the Belgian legation in Tokyo.⁸⁸ Having returned from the mission in London and with the prospect of the diplomatic exam, Marguerite and he had to decide whether or not to embark upon a diplomatic career. Count de Kerchove wrote that he would "divide this little 'life-schedule' into 4 parts: I) Advantages of *la Carrière* II) Disadvantages III) Advantages of life in Belgium IV) Its disadvantages." Each of these sections contained 'material' arguments on the one hand, and 'intellectual, social, etc.' arguments on the other hand. Kerchove left half of each page blank, for "my little Maggie to confide, after careful considerations, her observations, objections, or remarks."⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *EPNB*, 1991, 2, 325; KURGAN-VAN HENTENRYK, Ginette, "La Société Générale de Belgique et le financement de l'industrie 1870-1950", in P. MARGUERAT, L. TISSOT and Y. FROIDEVAUX, (eds.), *Banques et entreprises en Europe de l'Ouest, XIXe-XXe siècles: aspects nationaux et régionaux*, Neufchâtel, 2000, 203-208; DE PRETER, René, *De 200 rijkste families: geld en macht in de wereld van de holdings en de miljonairs*, Berchem, 1983, 19-52; FILLIEUX, Véronique, "Tenue de soirée de rigueur: incursion chez les Warocque'. Une certaine image de la bourgeoisie industrielle belge 1880-1930", *European Review of History*, 11/1, 2004, 41; and MASKENS, Robert, *Bourgeois de Bruxelles: petite histoire d'ancêtres sans histoires*, Brussels, 1988. For Kerchove, see VANDAELE, Jasmien, "André de Kerchove de Denterghem", in Tony VALCKE (ed.), *De fonteinen van de Oranjeberg. Politiek-institutionele geschiedenis van de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen van 1830 tot nu, deel 4: Biografieën van twintigste-eeuwse beleidsmakers*, Ghent, 2003, 21-42.

⁸⁸ ADCB, 1913-14, 151.

⁸⁹ This document, titled "Faut-il rester dans la diplomatie", was found by an undergraduate history student in the early 1990s in the attic of Park Beervelde's orangerie, together with some copies of official correspondence sent by Kerchove from Berlin to Brussels just months before Hitler's rise to power, and a package of documents about German internal politics from around the same time. I am grateful to Saskia Boelens for providing me with these documents, which are currently at the CEGESOMA in Brussels. A transcription of the letter is included in the Appendix.

To a certain extent, the structure of this part is dictated by the contents of their letter. It indeed provides unique insights into this part's main issue: why one would have wanted to become a diplomat in the decades before 1914. Yet Kerchove will not be taken as a gospel. On the one hand, he is clearly 'performing': he is creating the image of himself that he would like his wife to perceive. On the other hand, his motivations are not necessarily those of other diplomats. However, if put in dialogue with other contemporary sources, the young couple's various answers to this question do enable the reconstruction of both the diplomats' mental and material worlds. Addressing issues such as financial gain and diplomatic sociability, career paths and the prestige they could lead to, and the diplomats' ideas about politics and diplomacy, will help to assess the extent to which processes of democratization revealed themselves in the Belgian diplomats' culture during the first period of substantial extensions of the country's civic democracy.

The themes of access to the diplomatic corps and career patterns in diplomacy have inspired Belgian historians to produce empirically valuable studies that mainly focus on the mid-nineteenth century and take a sociological-institutional approach to the Belgian diplomatic community.⁹⁰ The broader question of why one became a diplomat in the late modern era, has only received scant attention within European historiography. A recent and elaborate answer comes from a student of British diplomats in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She argues that since the end of absolutism in Britain after the Glorious Revolution in 1688, embassies were no longer ways to gain royal favour and became less and less attractive for the aristocracy. However, because such periods of diplomatic exile could still lead to social and political advancement, members of the gentry and aristocratic dissidents occasionally decided to go abroad for a while, whether to obtain a rewarding position back home or to wait for the political climate in the capital to improve.⁹¹ Surely, diplomats faced a different world by the end of the nineteenth century. Social and political evolutions, technological developments, as well as the emerging globalization, the gradual professionalization, the further institutionalization of diplomacy, and finally its changing ideological framework after the 1815 Congress of Vienna, set in motion other forces of attraction towards the diplomatic career.⁹² Some of these have been touched upon by prosopographers who have analysed the diplomatic corps of some of the larger European

⁹⁰ DELSEMME, *Contribution*; DELSEMME, Martine, "Quelques aspects sociaux"; ROOSENS, "Agents diplomatiques"; ROOSENS, "L'accès".

⁹¹ MORI, Jennifer, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 21-36 (especially pp. 21-25).

⁹² MÖSSLANG and RIOTTE, "Introduction", 1-7 and 12-15; PAULMANN, "Diplomatie", 48-52.

countries in the decades before the First World War.⁹³ This part gratefully draws on their findings while creating a fuller picture of the island that Belgian diplomats in particular, and their European colleagues more generally, seemed to be living on back then. As will be shown, access to Diplomatic Island was very restricted, but those who were allowed in, could travel the road to glory, away from the forces of democratization that were operating on the mainland.

⁹³ DASQUE, “A la recherche de Monsieur de Norpois”, 269-271; DASQUE, “Une élite en mutation”, 93-94; CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Service*, 60-63; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 33-38.

CHAPTER 1. THE MATERIAL, SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL PERSPECTIVES

§ 1. From a Material Perspective

The issues at stake are well summarized by the 1911 written exchange by the aristocratic husband and his bourgeois wife introduced earlier. Under the heading ‘From a material perspective’, Kerchove informed Marguerite that he counted among the advantages of a career in diplomacy the fact that it “will give us first 3,000 per year, then 5,000 frs. by the age of 30; at 35-43 years, 10-12,000 frs. As minister, we have to count during the ten first years on an average of 25,000 frs. per year. When we will turn 53 years old, we will receive, in a prominent posting, some sixty-thousand frs.”

After more than a century of relative stability of the currency, Kerchove surely could not predict that inflation, devaluation and other financial-economic phenomena that followed the First World War would mean that very different figures appeared on his pay check by his fifty-third birthday.⁹⁴ Yet he was not being entirely accurate either as to what senior Belgian diplomats at high-ranking postings made at his time of writing. Prior to 1905, heads of mission in Berlin, London, Paris, St. Petersburg and Vienna had indeed annually received almost sixty-thousand francs. However, this amount, which had not changed since the early 1870s, also comprised representation costs and other expenses such as accommodation. From 1905 onwards, salaries and expenses were split up. Diplomats who had obtained the highest rank of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, now received an annual 21,000 frs. plus an amount for expenses that varied from 4,000 frs. in Luxemburg to 50,000 frs. in the capitals of the Great Powers.⁹⁵ In a time when an unskilled mason earned 3,5 frs. for a ten hour work day, this was indeed a lot of money.⁹⁶ Only the salaries of Ministers equalled those of diplomats. They outranked the second and third highest state salaries, those of top military officers and magistrates with equal length of service, by respectively twelve and thirty-two

⁹⁴ SCHOLLIERS, Peter, “Koopkracht en indexkoppeling. De Brusselse levensstandaard tijdens en na de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 1914-1925”, *BTNG*, 9/3-4, 333-334.

⁹⁵ These figures are drawn from the vote of the annual budget for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Here I only give the references for every three years starting from 1872, when heads of mission in London, Paris and St. Petersburg received 71.000 frs., of which they also had to pay their subordinates: PHK, 7 March 1872, 645-647 and 657; 23 January 1875, 285; 29 November 1877, 56-57; 8 June 1881, 1277-1278; 7 February 1884, 441-445; 1 February 1887, 418; 5 February 1890, 544-545; 1 December 1892, 168; 5 July 1895, 2088; 24 February 1899, 689-690; 9 April 1902, 1089-1090; 11 May 1905, 1343; 31 January and 4 February 1908, 609 and 616-619; and 11 July 1911, 1791.

⁹⁶ SCHOLLIERS, Peter, “A century of real industrial wages in Belgium, 1840 -1939”, in Peter SCHOLLIERS and V. ZAMAGNI (eds.), *Labour’s reward*, Aldershot, 1995, 106-137 and 203-205.

per cent. Moreover, after ten years of seniority, many young diplomats already received as much as the top bureaucrats in the ministerial departments.⁹⁷

Keeping this in mind, Marguerite's reaction is – at first sight – remarkable: she simply wrote that “I do not see any advantage, quite the contrary”. However, counting an uncle and two cousins in Belgian diplomacy, and having seen in London with her own eyes what diplomatic life was like, Kerchove's young wife knew perfectly well what distinguished the diplomatic career from other professions in the civil service. She knew that the price of a diplomatic career far exceeded the sum of a diplomat's salaries.⁹⁸ To uphold their country's prestige, but also to avoid losing face towards foreign colleagues, senior diplomats lavishly decorated their legations and threw sumptuous dinner parties, while younger diplomats appeared dressed to the height of fashion in clubs and salons, at theatres and balls, and in many other places where they could be seen spending money.⁹⁹ Thus, the generous salaries diplomats received were completely swallowed up by the conspicuous consumption that was an essential part of the job.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the expenses for representation provided by the government were mere trifles. Consequently, the Foreign Minister was regularly deluged with complaints of insufficient allowances. These mostly came from younger diplomats. Because only a limited number of junior postings were salaried, they had to wait for many years before receiving their first salary. In the 1860s, one of the thriftier Belgian diplomats calculated that twenty years of foreign postings had cost him more than twice what he had received. No wonder, then, that the career ambitions of less prosperous diplomats were often crippled.¹⁰⁰

The luckier ones had to exert all their diplomatic talents to convince their parents to keep sending them money. An attaché to the Belgian legation in Berlin in the late 1880s, Conrad de Buisseret-Steenbecque de Blarenghien sent his parents monthly overviews of his expenses. His first month, he calculated, cost his parents almost four hundred German marks,

⁹⁷ In 1911, the ten lieutenant-generals of the general staff, who were Belgium's top military officers, received 18.500 frs each, see PDK, 1910-1911, nr. 4.X, 61. Belgium's top five magistrates drew between 13.050 and 17.200 frs each, see PDK, 1910-1911, nr. 4.IV, 26-28. The secretary-generals and the director-generals, who were the top bureaucrats at the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Arts and Sciences, and Industries and Work, etc. received between 9.000 and 12.000 each, see PDK, 1910-1911, nrs. 4.IV, 24; 4.V, 18; 4.VI, 30; 4.VII, 42; 4.VIII, 24. These salaries had only increased very slightly since the mid-nineteenth century, compare DELSEMME, “Quelques aspects sociaux”, 53.

⁹⁸ AMBZ, PF 1529, “André de Kerchove de Denterghem”, André de Kerchove de Denterghem to Julien Davignon, 23 August 1910.

⁹⁹ DASQUE, Isabelle, « De la sociabilité des diplomates à la fin du XIXe siècle: codes et pratiques », J.P. CHALINE (eds.), *Elites et sociabilité en France. Actes du colloque organisé le 22 janvier 2003*, Paris, 2003, 268-282; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 67.

¹⁰⁰ DELSEMME, “Quelques aspects sociaux”, 45-49; DELSEMME, *Contribution*, 171-173; ROOSENS, “L'accès”, 157; DIERCKXSENS, Francis, *Jules Greindl: leven en denken van een jonge diplomaat*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1998, 53-64.

or a little less than five hundred Belgian francs. Of this amount, more than half went to food, more than a quarter to accommodation, and only an eighth to “pleasure”.¹⁰¹ Buisseret assured his parents that he did all he could to save money, even if that meant having lunch every other day at home instead of in a restaurant, skipping a charity event (but not without donating a precious drawing for the auction), and missing out on balls with especially expensive entry prices.¹⁰² It made him confident enough to ask his parents for extra money when obliged to pay dinner for a host of other young diplomats on the occasion of his promotion to second class secretary. Stressing how exceptional promotions were that required no change of posting, Buisseret implored his father to “take into account the costliness of life in Berlin and the fact that young diplomats usually drink a lot.”¹⁰³

Diplomatic life indeed entailed considerable unforeseen expenses. In the 1880s, the budget for Foreign Affairs allocated 162,500 francs for twenty-seven junior diplomats. Over sixty per cent went to the ten diplomats who had reached the rank of advisor, while the bulk of the remainder was divided between the first-class secretaries sent to overseas missions or to major European capitals. All other secretaries and attachés could only hope that part of their travel expenses were reimbursed.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, when, in the 1890s, Buisseret ranked among the first-class secretaries who received annual salaries of 5,000 to 8,000 francs, he still needed his mother’s financial support, spending an average 1,250 francs a month.¹⁰⁵

In 1911, just a few months after Kerchove and his wife discussed their professional future, the government raised the part of the foreign budget for junior diplomats by almost thirty per cent, from 217,000 to 300,000 frs. In comparison with the 1880s, this even meant an increase of forty-six per cent. However, since the number of junior diplomats had grown by more than a third to forty-one, and given that no longer one but rather eight of them were sent overseas, this increase changed little.¹⁰⁶

Compared to their foreign colleagues from France, Germany, and Great-Britain, Belgian diplomats were much less well off. Of course, Belgium was only a small power on the European scene and therefore had no embassies, which seemed to have functioned as a

¹⁰¹ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/1, Conrad de Buisseret [Steenbecque de Blarengchien] to Gaston de Buisseret [Steenbecque de Blarengchien], [August 1886].

¹⁰² CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/1, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard [de Montbrison], 21 January 1887; Conrad de Buisseret to Gaston de Buisseret, 10 February 1887. Conrad reported balls with an entry price of 50 francs, see CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/1, Conrad de Buisseret Steenbecque to Robert de Buisseret [Steenbecque de Blarengchien], 29 January 1887.

¹⁰³ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/1, Conrad de Buisseret to Gaston de Buisseret, 6 March 1887.

¹⁰⁴ AR, 1887, 71-74; PHK, 1 February 1887, 418; ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 4.

¹⁰⁵ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/1, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 29 July 1893 and 10 May 1895.

¹⁰⁶ AR, 1911, 30-34; PHK, 11 July 1911, 1791.

recognition of authority between the greater powers. France, Germany and Great-Britain maintained respectively nine, seven, and nine of them in different European capitals. These entailed considerably larger expenses than legations.¹⁰⁷ But even in comparison to France's ministers plenipotentiary, who ranked right behind ambassadors but were sent to legations in politically less important capitals, Belgium's top five diplomats earned thirty per cent less. French senior diplomats in smaller capitals generally received only a slightly larger representation allowance than their Belgian colleagues, but they had the advantage of not having to spend this money on accommodation. Junior diplomats, too, earned much higher salaries in France than in Belgium. Not taking into account those employed in embassies, French first-class secretaries received an average 12,000 frs. annually, or forty-two per cent more than their Belgian counterparts.¹⁰⁸ French diplomats of all ranks were underpaid compared to their German and British colleagues. Yet even very few of the latter could live on their salaries, and they, too, were expected to dip copiously into their private fortunes to support their official activities.¹⁰⁹

Contrary to the situation in Germany, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Italy, and even republican France (until 1894), the Belgian government never officially required its diplomats to have private incomes.¹¹⁰ However, the absence of such legislation seems to have functioned merely as a symbolic reminder of the democratic discourse of the country's founding fathers. Liberal revolutionaries who had come to power in 1830 had declared that Belgium would break with European aristocratic traditions and would enable the most competent citizens to hold diplomatic positions, regardless of their social backgrounds and personal wealth.¹¹¹ Such measures would have also accorded well with bourgeois distinctions between public and private life, as opposed to the interwoven character of both spheres so

¹⁰⁷ ROOSENS, *Agents diplomatiques*, iv-vii; DASQUE, *A la recherche de M. de Norpois*, 85; CECIL, *The German diplomatic service*, 158 ; STEINER, Zara, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914*, Blackrock, 1986, 175.

¹⁰⁸ *Het Belgisch Staatsblad*, 14 June 1914, 3775 and 3778; DASQUE, *A la recherche de M. de Norpois*, 84-93.

¹⁰⁹ DASQUE, *A la recherche de M. de Norpois*, 84-93; CECIL, *The German diplomatic service*, 44-53; STEINER, *The Foreign Office*, 174-175; JONES, Raymond A., *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815-1914*, Waterloo (Canada), 1983, 170-171. This might have been a European-wide phenomenon, see also the case of the Austro-Hungarian foreign service in GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 68-69.

¹¹⁰ VIAENE, Vincent, "Leopold I, de Belgische diplomatie en de cultuur van het Europese concert, 1831-1865", in VAN KEMSEKE, *Diplomatieke cultuur*, 129; ROOSENS, "L'accès", 156; CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Service*, 39, provides the examples of Germany (until 1908), England, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy. See also STEINER, *The Foreign Office*, 17 and 174; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 60-61; and OTTE, "Outdoor Relief", 43. For France, see HAYNE, *The French Foreign Office*, 8.

¹¹¹ See Charles Rogier and Hippolyte Vilain XIII quoted in DELSEMME, "Quelques aspects sociaux", 49.

characteristic of aristocratic lifestyles.¹¹² Actions followed words and the revolutionaries recruited, from within their own circles, able men of often modest means to represent the country abroad. However, these ideas had been abandoned very quickly, and of Belgium's revolutionary-diplomats, only two could pursue their diplomatic careers, one thanks to his marriage with a wealthy banker's daughter, the other because of his choice for a less expensive posting. From the late 1830s onwards, examples abound of aspirants being refused or admitted on the basis of their fortunes.¹¹³ The financial dimensions of the Foreign Ministry's admission policy thus had serious implications for the social stratification of the Belgian diplomatic corps.

In the decades before the First World War, aspiring diplomats were still warned that they would not receive any salary for four or five years, and thus had to make sure to honourably present themselves abroad with their own means.¹¹⁴ However, the Foreign Ministry now checked if candidates possessed the necessary financial capital to embark upon a diplomatic career. In doing so, it appears to have adopted a three-track policy. The fortunes of sons of aristocrats, Belgian diplomats, and members of the national political establishment were generally not explicitly scrutinized, presumably because the financial situation of these persons was assumed to be adequate.¹¹⁵ Sons of the Brussels bourgeoisie could get by with letters of recommendation that certified their sufficient wealth and were signed by prominent personalities or insiders to the Foreign Ministry.¹¹⁶ Middle-class candidates as well as the upper bourgeoisie and lower nobility from the provinces, who were usually less well-known in the capital, needed to pass through a more formal procedure. The Political Director, who was in charge of diplomatic personnel management, would frame a letter for the Foreign Minister to send to the provincial governor, who would then do the necessary research about,

¹¹² GOODMAN, Dena, "Public Sphere and Private Life: Towards a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime", *History and Theory*, 31/1, 1992, 1-20; WASSON, Ellis, *Aristocracy and the Modern World*, Basingstoke, 2006, 61.

¹¹³ ROOSENS, "L'accès", 157.

¹¹⁴ AMBZ, PF 1523, "Bernard de l'Escaille", Note of Direction P, 4 December 1901.

¹¹⁵ I have checked 24 out of 36 personnel files of diplomats active in 1914 and whose ancestors were ennobled before the French Revolution. Not one contains explicit inquiries from the Foreign Ministry about their financial situation. The same goes for five (out of seven) and all seven (out of seven) personnel files of, respectively, bourgeois diplomats' sons and sons of bourgeois ministers and senators that I have consulted.

¹¹⁶ See for instance the case of Charles Symon, who was the son of an official at the Ministry of Public Works but was recommended by a family member who worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This person assured the Foreign Minister that Symon "met in every way the requirements to enter the diplomatic corps". See AMBZ, PF 1421, "Charles Symon", Note of Direction P, 27 July 1903. For a more explicit example, see the case of Pierre Orts, son to a lawyer at Belgium's supreme court, the Court of Cassation. His letter of recommendation stated that "he finds himself in a situation of fortune that allows him to pursue the diplomatic career. See ROOSENS, "L'accès", 157.

amongst other elements, the applicants' financial state. If judged satisfactory, the candidate stood a fair chance of obtaining the title *attaché de legation*.¹¹⁷

Most of them easily passed the test. Claude Roosens has calculated that, of all diplomats born before 1853, some thirty per cent figured on the list of eligibles for the Belgian Senate until the levy for eligibility was partly abolished and partly diminished in 1893. For each of the nine Belgian provinces, this list contained the names of the biggest direct tax payers who had reached the age of forty. This was a small number of people, 735 in 1852 and still less than twice that amount four decades later. To strengthen his argument for the great wealth of Belgian diplomats in the mid and late nineteenth century, Roosens adds that many of them resigned from the diplomatic service or died before the age of forty, while others held most of their property outside of Belgium.¹¹⁸ At the time when Kerchove and his wife had their epistolary conversation, the Belgian diplomatic corps counted seventy-nine members in active service.¹¹⁹ Since only five of these could possibly qualify for a seat in the Senate (being born before 1853), it is more useful to look into the wealth of their fathers and – in the case of the junior diplomats – their grandfathers. This results in forty-one per cent of Belgian diplomats having their father on the list, while another eighteen per cent counted their father's father among the eligibles. Out of the fifty-six diplomats with a Belgian mother, half had a maternal grandfather who ran or could have run for Senate.

It seems reasonable to assume that the remaining diplomats, i.e. those whose fathers and grandfathers were not on the Senate eligibility list, were quite well-off, too. Again, the families of several of them mainly owned estates in foreign countries, whereas others had fathers who were not Belgian citizens.¹²⁰ In addition, given that Belgium's fiscal system taxed landownership far more heavily than revenues from personal property and gains from industry and commerce, the list of eligibles was largely composed of members of the landed classes, although it should be mentioned that in the last decades of the nineteenth century,

¹¹⁷ See for instance the cases of Emmanuel Havenith (AMBZ, PF 147), Charles Wauters (AMBZ, PF 387), and Guy Heyndrickx (AMBZ, PF 1526). I will treat these more thoroughly in §2. See also AMBZ, PF 348, "Marc van der Haeghen", Raymond de Kerchove d'Exaerde to Paul de Favereau, 27 November 1906; and PF 1232, "Charles de Royer", Note of Direction P, 17 May 1902; Raoul du Sart de Bouland to Paul de Favereau, 31 May 1902.

¹¹⁸ ROOSENS, "L'accès", 156-157; STENGERS, *Index*, 9-40.

¹¹⁹ This information is based on ADCB, 1910, 172-175, and 1914, 175-181; AR, 1910-1914; and EPNB.

¹²⁰ The former was the case for, among others, Baron Maximilien d'Erp and Count Gaston Errembault de Dudzele, see ROOSENS, "L'accès", 156-157. Examples of the latter include Robert Everts, whose father was Dutch, and Paul May, son of the German-Jewish banker Julius May.

industrialists and bankers invested ever more in landed property and gradually outnumbered the traditional landed classes in the Senate.¹²¹

Perhaps more importantly, wealth was also acquired through marriage. In April 1911, forty-four out of seventy-nine diplomats (fifty-six per cent) were married, of which seventeen (thirty-nine per cent) had found a Belgian spouse. Almost two-thirds of these women's fathers and or grandfathers figure on the Senate eligibility list.¹²² Twenty-one wives of Belgian diplomats (forty-eight per cent) came from other European countries. Although it is difficult to establish the extent to which they increased their husband's wealth, their names and other circumstantial evidence suggest that in general the Belgian diplomatic corps benefitted considerably from these foreign marriages. Most diplomats married into the European aristocracy, but some made matches with Jewish and American women. Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, son of the late Belgian minister in Paris, represented his country at the Rumanian court when he wedded Marguerite Oppenheim, daughter of an extremely wealthy German-Jewish banker's family. The impact of marriage on the financial perspectives of Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle was even bigger. Lemaire had always dreamed of a diplomatic career, but lack of fortune caused him to fear "not to be able to make a sufficiently good impression in diplomacy" and spurred him to opt for consulship. His marriage with Dorothy Davis, the daughter of an affluent British-Jewish family, allowed him to achieve his dream after he inherited a "considerable fortune" from his mother-in-law.¹²³ Like five other Belgian diplomats, Raymond Leghait chose to follow the example of many European colleagues and married an American heiress.¹²⁴ In October 1895, he took as a bride Miss Jeannette Payson from New York, who was told to receive from her mother an annual \$5,000, or more than 25,000 frs.¹²⁵ This certainly helped enable the couple to honourably present themselves in Rome and Paris, Leghait's next postings.

¹²¹ DE BELDER, "Veranderingen", 483-501. The system had been introduced in the early days of Belgian independence to institutionalise the political power of the propertied classes, which were held to exercise a moderate influence in the young country and to render the regime acceptable to the governments of neighbouring countries. Although landed property was most heavily taxed in young Belgium, taxes on exterior signs of wealth such as outside doors and windows, fireplaces, household effects, domestic personnel, horses, etc., on the practice of professions such as notary and physician, and some other forms of taxes counted as well. See STENGERS, Jean et al. (eds.), *Index des éligibles au Sénat, 1831-1893*, Brussels, 1975, 9-40 and 104-135.

¹²² At least 10 out of 17, with 2 out of 17 whose grandfather's identity is difficult to establish, but who belong to families with several men on the eligibility list. See "Van der Heyden à Hauzeur" and "Hennequin de Villermont" in EPNB, 2000, 73-76, and 1990, 208-211; and STENGERS, *Index*, 449 and 285.

¹²³ AMBZ, PF 1426, "Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle", Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle to Julien Davignon, 12 November 1909; Note of the Cabinet, 16 November 1909; Note of Direction P, 23 November 1909.

¹²⁴ See also CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Service*, 169; WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 108-109.

¹²⁵ ANONYMOUS, "Raymond Le Ghait's wedding", *The New York Times*, 29 October 1895.

Surely, these surveys can only provide approximate indications of the overall wealth of Belgian diplomats and cannot establish their exact individual fortunes. This also means that a few men of substance remain unidentified. This is the case for Adrien Nieuwenhuys, the first secretary at the legation in Berlin. Nieuwenhuys' father Auguste, the youngest son of a large family of art dealers with roots in the Netherlands, became private secretary to the Prince of Chimay, the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1884 to 1892. He started off with relatively modest means, but a number of inheritances, one of which amounted to almost half a million frs., quickly turned Auguste into a very wealthy man. It also enabled Adrien, his eldest of two surviving children, to pursue a career in diplomacy without too many financial concerns.¹²⁶

If Pierre Orts, a diplomat who entered the corps in 1898, is to be believed, some relatively less wealthy candidates, too, managed to embark upon a diplomatic career. In his unpublished memoirs, written after the Second World War, Orts claims to have known “young diplomats with no fortune who, while keeping up the appearance of an elegant and easy life, could not spare the money for a daily meal.”¹²⁷ However, Orts might have engaged in some poetic licence here, drawing on stories from times already gone by when he entered the foreign service. If the patriotic zeal of the first years of Belgian independence had incited various young men with limited financial means to represent their country abroad to the extent of personal bankruptcy, it seems that by the early twentieth century the career had again become the privilege of the rich.¹²⁸ The largely half-hearted effort around 1830 to open the diplomatic service to the relatively less wealthy, had indeed gone into reverse before the second half of the nineteenth century had started, and was never seriously repeated until after the First World War.

Yet that does not alter the fact that a career in diplomacy remained – even for the wealthy – awfully dear. Although he had acquired a considerable fortune, not only through his wife but also through his mother, who was born in one of the country's richest families, Kerchove surely was well aware that this also applied to him.¹²⁹ In the second section of his letter, he acknowledged that “life in the Career is horribly expensive”, and that “far from saving money, we will have to break into our capital and thus leave a diminished capital to

¹²⁶ KEULEN, Huub, “De familie Nieuwenhuys”, *Geulrand*, 21, 1988, 22-24.

¹²⁷ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 5.

¹²⁸ ROOSENS, “L'accès”, 159.

¹²⁹ Kerchove's mother was a scion of the Lippens family, see DE PRETER, *De 200 rijkste families*, 81; STEPHANY, Pierre, *Portraits de grandes familles*, Brussels, 2004, Chapter “Lippens”.

our children. My diplomatic salary will not change anything, for it is insignificant until our last posting.”

Such considerations incited Belgian diplomats to get as much money out of the Foreign Ministry as possible. They generally met with a rebuff, though. When Raymond Leghait’s father Alfred, head of mission in Saint Petersburg, asked the Foreign Minister to more than double his pay “in the interest of the country”, Political Director Léon Arendt responded that he should adapt his lifestyle to his salary and his personal wealth. To grant Leghait extra money, Arendt argued, would have been “absolutely contrary to the traditions of Belgian diplomacy”, and, more importantly, would never be approved by the Chamber of Representatives.¹³⁰ However, despite the fact that the budget for Foreign Affairs voted in parliament contained ever more restrictions on its allocation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs managed to maintain some leverage on how to distribute its budget. Article sixteen of the foreign budget allowed the payment of “unforeseen expenses not indicated in the budget.”¹³¹ On the one hand, this article allowed the Foreign Minister to financially compensate junior diplomats who served for a long time in overseas postings that were particularly expensive or suffered from unhealthy climates.¹³² On the other hand, the means that it supplied often became a stake for senior diplomats. In April 1914, Baron Beyens, who represented Belgium at the court of the German Kaiser, vented his fear that “the remainder of the credit available under article sixteen had already been distributed, without any of it being reserved for your servant.” This, he admitted in a letter to the Political Director, would have made him “very disgruntled and saddened for several reasons, not to mention the hope you have scintillated in my eyes”. Such remuneration had always been granted to his predecessor, Beyens argued, adding that his colleague in Paris annually received 2,000 frs. more than him from the same budget.¹³³ The extent of each diplomats’ personal wealth might have differed, they surely wanted to be treated equally.

The young people who entered the Belgian diplomatic corps in the decades before the First World War, surely had other career options. There were plenty of other branches of the civil service that would have welcomed them, and even for the aristocracy, to occupy oneself with commerce and industry had become considerably less ignoble than it had been a decade

¹³⁰ AMBZ, PF 403, “Légation de Saint-Petersbourg”, Alfred Leghait to Léon Arendt, 14 June 1901; Léon Arendt to Paul de Favereau, 28 June 1901.

¹³¹ PHS, 26 June 1913, 497.

¹³² AMBZ, PF 1522, “Adhémar Delcoigne”, Note of Direction P, 3 September 1906.

¹³³ AMBZ, PF 31, “Eugène-Napoléon Beyens”, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy, 24 April 1914.

earlier.¹³⁴ Yet these young people chose a career that because of the insufficiency of the salaries, was generally a huge financial burden. Why?

Pierre Bourdieu's social theory conceptualizes modern society as an aggregate of fairly autonomous social spaces that each have their own logic. The world of diplomacy is one of these 'fields', to use Bourdieu's terminology. In order to be successful, those who wish to work within the field have to believe in its utility and covet the fruits that it produces. This is what Bourdieu calls the *illusio*.¹³⁵ In the case of late modern diplomacy, these fruits were definitely not of a financial nature. To dispose of a substantial economic capital was a prerequisite rather than an aim of the diplomatic career. Those who chose to embark upon a diplomatic career, must have been convinced that the financial costs that representing their country abroad entailed could be transformed into other forms of capital, and that it was worthwhile to devote their time to obtaining this goal.¹³⁶ Perhaps looking at the arguments that Kerchove grouped under the heading 'From an intellectual, social etc. perspective' could reveal what was to be gained.

§ 2. From a Social and Intellectual Perspective

A Brilliant Life

First of all, Kerchove argued, "*La Carrière* will allow us to lead a very brilliant life; it will open all the doors and will lead us to see 'Society' in all the postings." Rather than attending state ceremonies, seeing 'Society' meant going to dinner parties at embassies and legations, and taking part in the capital's social life, which centred around salons and theatres. While salons often provided the settings for soirees and costume balls patronized by diplomats and local prominents, theatres might have even better represented the cosmopolitan character of diplomatic sociability, as secretaries and attachés from different countries regularly went on stage to play some pieces amongst themselves.¹³⁷

As Conrad de Buisseret noticed upon his arrival, Berlin in the late 1880s was one of those capitals that really had "quite a strong esprit de corps. Everyone, advisors, chargés,

¹³⁴ WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 42-51.

¹³⁵ BOURDIEU, Pierre, *Argumenten voor een reflexieve maatschappijwetenschap*, Amsterdam, 1992, 57-58 and 74.

¹³⁶ BOURDIEU, Pierre, "The forms of capital", in J. RICHARDSON (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York, 241-258.

¹³⁷ DASQUE, "De la sociabilité", 272-275.

secretaries meet up for dinner and fraternise without distinction of rank.”¹³⁸ Other young Belgian diplomats and Buisseret’s Italian, French and Austrian colleagues took him virtually every night to the theatre, the circus, the opera, and one time even to a student *Kneipe*, where he witnessed with some wonderment how two groups of differently hatted students sat opposite to each other, alternatively drinking beer and singing to the beat of a student leader with a rapier.¹³⁹ These excitements might have made up for the evenings that Buisseret’s head of mission urged him to go to “dull ceremonies” like the presentation of one ambassador’s wife, or balls at court and in other ambassadors’ residences. At such occasions, however, he could always appreciate a young woman that gave a “splendid cotillion”.¹⁴⁰ Arriving sometime during the last months of 1893 in Petropolis, the imperial city near Rio where diplomats stationed in Brazil spent the summer, Buisseret found himself immediately caught up in what he called the “whirl of Society.” During ‘season’ time, three months of almost daily dinner parties at embassies and legations, the circus functioned as his only “haven of refuge” on rare nights off.¹⁴¹ In the United States a few years later, Buisseret was not granted such relaxed evenings. “American traditions want the whole year to be a perpetual excitement”, he informed his mother, adding that this obliged him to hurry from a “moonlight sail” on the boat of the Astor family, via an island ball given by a Turkish diplomat, to a “clam bake” at Mrs Vanderbilt’s.¹⁴²

Contrary to Kerchove, Buisseret claimed to dislike the representation side of diplomatic sociability. Both, however, rejoiced in what could be labelled as the intellectual side of it. Kerchove even listed as the second advantage of the diplomatic career that it “offers us a very wide observation field of life in the big intellectual centres.” This aspect of diplomatic life materialized to some extent in salons, but more so in clubs and in literary and artistic circles. These places allowed diplomats to get informally acquainted with each other and with prominent people from the worlds of politics, literature, journalism, academia, and so on.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/1, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 5 August 1886.

¹³⁹ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/1, Conrad de Buisseret to Gaston de Buisseret, [early July] 1886 ; Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, [late July] 1886, 25 February and 6 March 1887.

¹⁴⁰ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/1, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, [late July] 1886, 21 January and 10 February 1887.

¹⁴¹ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/2, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 14 January and 2 March 1893. On the different ‘seasons’ in European capitals, see WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 100-101.

¹⁴² CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 18 December 1894, 29 July, 28 August, and 26 September 1895.

¹⁴³ DASQUE, “De la sociabilité”, 275-276; WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 101-102.

As Buisseret experienced, such institutions could also provide another “fabulous refuge” from the hectic season.¹⁴⁴ The young diplomat could often be seen in the clubs of Vienna and Washington, compiling letters, reading newspapers, or doing research in the clubs’ libraries for some of the many articles that he wrote “in order to occupy the surplus of leisure” that a career in diplomacy seems to have entailed.¹⁴⁵ During the 1890s, Buisseret managed to have almost a dozen articles published in the *Revue générale* alone. These addressed a variety of genres and topics, such as reflections about patriotism and colonialism, pieces of literary prose, and anthropological and cultural studies about the places that his early career had already taken him.¹⁴⁶

Several of his colleagues spent their spare time in a similar way. Count Guillaume d’Arschot-Schoonhoven published three collections of poems and some prosaic works while stationed as a junior diplomat at the Belgian legations in Saint Petersburg, Bern, Bucharest and Paris.¹⁴⁷ Secretary in Rome during the first three years of the twentieth century, Joseph Mélot combined his passions for photography and art history in a book about Florentine statues. Leading the Belgian legation in Athens ten years later, he managed to combine his political and economic activities with the publication of a travel guide to important archaeological sites of ancient Greece. In the meantime, Mélot had successfully submitted several articles of a political-historical nature to the *Revue générale*.¹⁴⁸

That, from the late nineteenth century onwards, ever more diplomats started to reveal themselves as writers, certainly had something to do with the growing importance in the diplomatic metier of editorial skills and of the observation of persons and nations.¹⁴⁹ Yet their predilection for literature, cultural studies, and history, probably sprung from their education. With the exception of two civil engineers, in the years before the First World War, every Belgian diplomat had completed at least two years of university studies in Letters and

¹⁴⁴ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 14 and 22 August and 18 December 1894.

¹⁴⁵ BUISSERET, “Belgrade en 1888”, *Revue générale*, February 1889, 218.

¹⁴⁶ See his “Histoire ordinaire” (August 1890), “Des Carpathes aux Balkans” (October 1891), “Le Mourant” (October 1892), “Chez les Indiens lenguas du Paraguay” (February 1894), “Washington en 1895” (November 1895), “Le championnat de la boxe aux Etats-Unis” (July 1896), “Des colonies” (May 1897), “Carnuntum (en Autriche)” (November 1897), “Propos d’Orient” (October 1898), “Gens et choses d’Amérique” (March 1899), “Un gentleman” (September 1899), in *Revue générale*.

¹⁴⁷ D’ARSCHOT-SCHOONHOVEN, Guillaume, *Le reflet des heures*, Brussels, 1898; Id., *Sourires perdus*, Brussels, 1903; Id., *Quelques étapes. Notes de voyages*, Brussels, 1907; Id., *Quelques vers*, Brussels, 1910.

¹⁴⁸ MELOT, Joseph, *Figures florentines*, Brussels, 1904; Id., *Entre l’Olympe et le Taygète. Ouvrage illustré de 6 gravures d’après les photographies de l’auteur*, Paris, 1913; Id., “Les déconvenues de Garibaldi”, *la Revue générale*, June, October and November 1907; Id., “Voltaire à Bruxelles”, *Revue générale*, February 1910.

¹⁴⁹ BADEL, Laurence, et al., “Introduction”, in Laurence BADEL, et al. (eds.), *Ecrivains et diplomates. L’invention d’une tradition XIXe-XXIe siècles*, Paris, 2012, 21-24.

Philosophy.¹⁵⁰ Their profession often took them to faraway places, where confrontations with other peoples and lifestyles sometimes incited them to transmit the cultural and ethnographic knowledge they had acquired, to the social circles they belonged to in their home countries.¹⁵¹

While in Washington, Buisseret incorporated several of his articles in a book that came out in 1897. *Paysages étrangers* not only contained chapters about urban society in Belgrade, Washington, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, but also narrated Buisseret's experiences with life on Brazilian coffee plantations and his sojourn at a Chaco-Indian encampment in Paraguay.¹⁵² Although expressed in a language that will strike most present-day readers as utterly racist towards virtually everyone that lived in late nineteenth century Latin America, the reading of this book might have inspired Kerchove to add another advantage of the diplomatic career that might have convinced his wife.¹⁵³ "We both have", he insisted, "the spirit of adventure and traveling, a spirit that obsesses us to leave our milieu."

Not seldom inspired by the widely read novels of Jules Verne and Daniel Defoe, more than one young European diplomat regarded the career at least partly as a reasonably priced luxury travel agency.¹⁵⁴ In an age when developments in transportation had connected most capitals of the world by steamboat and train, it indeed offered a combination of wonderful sights and manageable adventures, while at the same time granting opportunities for ethnographical field trips.¹⁵⁵ Again, such activities formed an integral part of diplomatic sociability, for diplomats actively sought the company of colleagues while travelling to their host countries, and often undertook adventurous journeys together. Writing from Washington in 1895, Buisseret tried to persuade his mother to grant him a one-time only 5,000 francs, so that he could join the German military attaché on a two-month road trip through the United States. The journey, Buisseret claimed, was highly recommended to him by the head of the Belgian legation, and would take them to "Saint Louis, the State of Arizona, the Colorado River, the famous 'Yellowstone Park' ... (where the geysers, the sulphur lakes, and the buffalos are)", and from San Francisco all the way up to Alaska, which he had heard to be

¹⁵⁰ ADCB, 1914, 131-174.

¹⁵¹ See DANIEL, Yves, "Paul Claudel témoin du tournant global: 'Le présent comporte toujours la réserve du futur'", in BADEL, *Ecrivains et diplomates*, 193-206.

¹⁵² DE BUISSERET-STEENBECQUE DE BLARENGHIEN, Conrad, *Paysages étrangers: Brésil – la Plata – Paraguay; Belgrade en 1888; des Carpathes aux Balkans, Washington in 1895*, Brussels, 1897.

¹⁵³ STOLS, Eddy, "Aux origines de la 'fièvre argentine': les premières relations entre la Belgique et le Rio de la Plata", in Jacques JOSET and Philippe RAXHON (eds.), *1898-1998: fines de siglos: historia y literatura hispanoamericanas = 1898-1998: fins de siècles: histoire et littérature hispano-américaines*, Liege, 2000, 61-62.

¹⁵⁴ See also DASQUE, "A la recherche de Monsieur de Norpois, 269; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 37.

¹⁵⁵ WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 88-89.

“one of the most beautiful places in the world.”¹⁵⁶ The dowager countess de Buisseret might have found such a voyage less unsettling than the crocodile hunting expedition that her youngest son embarked upon in Paraguay a year and a half earlier, even though the latter took place under the professional guidance of a “tiger killer”.¹⁵⁷

Notwithstanding his letters from the 1890s being filled with heroic stories of a young man edging his way through the Brazilian forests with a machete, and hunting down, killing, and eating some of its species, Buisseret could also enjoy less adventurous physical activities.¹⁵⁸ In Washington, he joined other young diplomats in long promenades, went on horse rides that could last for many hours, played tennis games, and prided himself on mastering a bicycle better than most of his colleagues.¹⁵⁹ In non-Western capitals that lacked a flourishing local Society, the practice of sports even tended to comprise the largest part of diplomatic sociability.¹⁶⁰ Not long after Robert Everts heard about his nomination as first secretary in China, he received two letters from Beijing. One was written by his predecessor, who assured him that “you will like the simple and relaxed life one leads here, and you will have the chance to do a lot of sports here, even fencing.”¹⁶¹ The other came from the head of the Belgian legation, who provided Everts with a bit more details: “Do take your sportswear, for in a posting with so little entertainment, equestrianism and polo are the two great reliefs. Also bring along your shooting equipment, ..., your boots and shoes – white tennis shoes, etc. In wintertime, there is a lot of ice skating and ‘hockey on the ice’, and gulf in summer, I am told. In any case, bring your golf clubs.”¹⁶²

In addition to keeping themselves in good shape and to providing them with opportunities for social intercourse, sports for diplomats functioned foremost as means to manifest a certain social condition. Hunting, playing polo, and mastering a horse in general, even a steel one in the case of Buisseret and the Washington diplomatic corps, allowed them to indulge in a lifestyle that was traditionally associated with the upper classes. This also goes for tennis and fencing, where opponents recognized their mutual social positions by confronting each other in a manner reminiscent of chivalrous duels.¹⁶³ As Isabelle Dasque has rightly argued, not only the diplomats’ sporting activities but also the whole concept of diplomatic sociability before the First World War was infused with aristocratic manners and

¹⁵⁶ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 10 May 1895.

¹⁵⁷ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/2, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 1 and 22 October 1893.

¹⁵⁸ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/2, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 14 January and 31 April 1893.

¹⁵⁹ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 13 March and 29 July 1895.

¹⁶⁰ DASQUE, “De la sociabilité”, 276-277.

¹⁶¹ AMBZ, PF 417 “Robert Everts”, Edmond de Prelle de la Nieppe to Robert Everts, 23 October 1910.

¹⁶² AMBZ, PF 417 “Robert Everts”, Emile de Cartier de Marchienne to Robert Everts, 22 October 1910.

¹⁶³ WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 90-93; DASQUE, “De la sociabilité”, 278-281.

values. As such, it decisively contributed to maintaining an esprit de corps and to fostering a sense of international camaraderie based on affinity and kinship.¹⁶⁴ These practices were indeed not just cultural heritage of times past. They were directly imported from the social environments that European diplomats sprung from.

Aristocratic Environments

Also in the Belgian case, these environments were primarily aristocratic. On 23 April 1911, the Belgian diplomatic corps counted fifty-nine out of seventy-nine diplomats with noble status, that is almost 75 per cent.¹⁶⁵ Of these men, forty, or more than half of the entire corps, could date their aristocratic descent back to at least the early modern period, when their ancestors received, primarily from the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs, letters patent of nobility, or were confirmed, rehabilitated or titled by the Kings of Spain or France, or by the Emperors of Austria.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, the families of more than four out of every five of these ‘ancien regime’ noblemen, had enjoyed noble privileges for more than a century when the French Revolution temporarily abolished them. Furthermore, at least sixteen diplomats had ascendants who were ennobled during the age of chivalry, that is before the strong rise of elevations to the nobility that took place from the mid-sixteenth century onwards.¹⁶⁷ Among them, junior diplomats such as prince Albert de Ligne and count Baudouin de Lichtervelde, and their senior colleagues count Charles de Lalaing and baron Maximilien d’Erp belonged to families whose noble origins had already been self-evident in the Middle Ages. However important in determining their standing in Belgian high society, aristocratic seniority alone might have contributed little to establishing their noblesse within the larger diplomatic community. Noble titles were surely more effective in that regard. The lack of dukes and the

¹⁶⁴ DASQUE, “De la sociabilité”, 282.

¹⁶⁵ In order to establish the aristocratic seniority and origin of ennoblement of Belgian diplomats, I have cross-checked four publications: on the one hand, to identify the members of the Belgian diplomatic corps, I have used the *Almanach Royal* [AR], the annual state publication that lists all Belgian government officials, and the *Manuel/Annuaire diplomatique et consulaire* [ADC], a publication from the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that includes hierarchical lists and career developments of Belgian diplomats. To find out more about the possible noble status of these men, I have recurred to the *Etat présent de la noblesse belge* [EPNB], which contains genealogies and information about the aristocratic seniority of all Belgian noble families, and to DUERLOO and JANSSENS, *Wapenboek*, which includes references to letters patent of nobility granted to noblemen.

¹⁶⁶ To divide between the ancien regime nobility and the men of more recent noble status, I have chosen the year 1795, when in the former Habsburg Netherlands the aristocracy was abolished by the French revolutionary regime. See JANSSENS, *De evolutie van de Belgische adel*, 281.

¹⁶⁷ To divide between the feudal nobility and more recent ancien regime aristocracy, I have chosen the year 1555 as boundary, by analogy of the Royal Decree promulgated by King William I of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands on 23 May 1817. See JANSSENS, *De evolutie van de Belgische adel*, 108-112, 117-118 and 123-125.

scarcity of princes (two) among Belgian diplomats was compensated by the presence of seventeen counts, one viscount, and eight barons. Comparatively fewer, and less prestigious titles had been conferred upon the ancestors of the remaining nineteen diplomats, whose families' noble status was younger than the Belgian state: there were seven barons and one count among those who had a father (twelve), a grandfather (six), or a great-grandfather (one) who had earned ennoblement by the Belgian King because of their services to the state as leading politicians or high-ranking officials.¹⁶⁸

Although different scholars adopt different criteria, different distinctions of rank exist within the nobilities of different countries, and many foreign services still lack prosopographic studies, it seems safe to say that the overall aristocratic seniority of the Belgian diplomatic corps did not make it lose face towards other European countries' foreign services, in which aristocrats played a prominent role. According to Thomas Otte, who compared the French, British, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian diplomatic corps, the men who came to power in Paris in the early 1870s initially refrained from revolutionizing access to the diplomatic corps, so that even by the mid-1880s, still seventy-five per cent of French diplomats were nobles. However, purges directed against aristocrats and a more general economic decline of the French nobility, caused this number to drop to a mere seven per cent in the decade before 1914.¹⁶⁹ Isabelle Dasque presents slightly different figures, but also found that of all diplomats who embarked upon a diplomatic career from the 1880s onwards, less than 10 per cent was recruited among families that belonged to the nobility before the French Revolution, while those with ancestors ennobled in the nineteenth century made up little over 10 per cent of the corps.¹⁷⁰ Of British diplomats who entered the foreign service between 1860 and 1914, Raymond Jones has calculated, 38 per cent were aristocrats while 22 per cent belonged to the landed gentry.¹⁷¹ Otte has criticized Jones's methodology, claiming that he underestimates the proportion of aristocrats in the British diplomatic corps. Taking into account only heads of missions between the 1850s and the First World War, Otte judged that the number of peers and their ascendants together with baronets amounted to at least fifty-five per cent.¹⁷² The diplomatic services of the Imperial powers Germany and Austria-Hungary, as Otte agrees with Lamar Cecil and William Godsey, were far more aristocratic, both counting well over 80 per cent members of the nobility. The Russian tsar

¹⁶⁸ The exception is Léon Capelle, the head of the Commercial Direction at the Foreign Ministry, who had been conceded noble status in 1906, and conferred the title of baron in 1912.

¹⁶⁹ OTTE, "Outdoor relief", 30-31.

¹⁷⁰ DASQUE, *A la Recherche de M. de Norpois*, 211-224 (at 220).

¹⁷¹ JONES, *The British Diplomatic Service*, 139.

¹⁷² OTTE, "Outdoor relief", 27.

had a diplomatic corps at his disposal that was socially stratified in a very similar than those of the other two emperors.¹⁷³

Comparing these numbers with the Belgian case, one could argue that the social composition of the Belgian diplomatic corps bore more resemblance to an ‘imperial model’ than it did to a ‘republican model’. This was probably the case in other European constitutional monarchies as well. The Netherlands, a constitutional monarchy with whom Belgium shared a neutralist stance in international politics and similar interests in the wider world, disposed of a significantly smaller yet relatively more aristocratic diplomatic corps. As Hans Niezing has shown, in 1913 the Dutch diplomatic corps counted a mere thirty-three members, of which thirty were nobles.¹⁷⁴

In the years before the First World War, social intercourse between diplomats remained largely restricted to those representing European countries. Diplomatic life in China around the turn of the century evidenced this kind of segregation most clearly. One reason why Robert Everts’s predecessor could inform him about the “simple and relaxed life” he would lead in Beijing, was the complete lack of ceremonies and receptions to which both diplomats and local high society were invited. Social events happened between members of the diplomatic corps, which apart from the Japanese diplomats, comprised only representatives of Western powers. Except for the occasional pony ride or hunting trip, these events generally took place within *Legation Street*, an extended part of the Beijing city centre that, since the Boxer Uprising ended in 1901, fell under the authority of the diplomats themselves.¹⁷⁵ China gradually ‘westernised’ its institutions, including its diplomatic apparatus, but it would take a World War before its diplomats became somewhat integrated into the international diplomatic community.

Although of European extraction, Latin-American diplomats were hardly more successful at speeding up this process. They did try, however. Henri Davignon claimed to remember that when his father organized dinner parties at the Foreign Ministry in Brussels, he experienced considerable difficulties “dosing the South-Americans”, by which he meant inviting at every party just the amount of these diplomats, “who were present in large numbers and little integrated into Society”, that it would not offend other guests. The wife of a diplomat from a smaller European country even complained to him that “the minister

¹⁷³ OTTE, “Outdoor relief”, 32-43; CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Service*, 68; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 16-17.

¹⁷⁴ NIEZING, Hans, “De Nederlandse diplomaat: adel of niet-adel. Een incompleet stukje sociale kaart van Nederland”, *Trans-aktie*, 1/4, 1972, 8-9.

¹⁷⁵ VAN DER PUTTEN, Frans-Paul, “Diplomatieke cultuur in de gezantschapswijk van Beijing in de late negentiende en vroege twintigste eeuw”, in VAN KEMSEKE, *Diplomatieke cultuur*, 157-172.

always invites me together with macaques”.¹⁷⁶ While Davignon in the 1930s could not approve of such language, Buisseret in the 1890s did not seem to have any problem with it and often referred to Latin American prominents as simian parvenus. When asked by his mother to write something about his colleagues, he limited himself to the description of European diplomats of all ranks, casually adding “the diplomats of South America do not count.”¹⁷⁷ Arguably, the often modest social backgrounds of these men and their accreditation from republican regimes entailed their near-exclusion from the diplomatic social world. Some leaders of Latin American republics surely grasped the negative foreign policy consequences that this situation could provoke, and appear to have tried to involve their country’s aristocrats, whose mostly European noble descent was not legally recognized as such, in carrying out foreign policy.¹⁷⁸

In a world dominated by European imperialism and in a profession that counted the collection of information through the cultivation of local contacts among its core activities, members of a cosmopolitan European aristocracy naturally obtained wider and easier access to these sources. Not only did they share social backgrounds and lifestyles with most of the political and diplomatic elites in their host countries, noble family ties through marriage or birth often ran all over the continent while aristocratic upbringings raised the diplomats’ awareness of matters of rank and etiquette, ever so vital in late nineteenth century high politics.¹⁷⁹ Contemporary writers on diplomacy explicitly stated that high birth functioned as an invaluable asset in negotiations, because it determined the diplomats’ aptitude for the kind of sociability that conditioned diplomatic encounters.¹⁸⁰

Although they had no intention of reserving the diplomatic career for members of the aristocracy only, such ideas did find ready reception with the leading officials at the Belgian Foreign Ministry.¹⁸¹ As in most European countries, aspiring diplomats had to prove their

¹⁷⁶ DAVIGNON, “Diplomatie”, 505-506.

¹⁷⁷ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/2, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 2 March 1893. Buisseret generally referred to Brazilian prominents as ‘rastaquouères’ and felt that “the nickname ‘macaques’ given to the Brazilians, and which deeply humiliates them, is perfectly justified.” See CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 14 January 1893.

¹⁷⁸ See MACIAS-GONZALEZ, Victor, “The Mexican Aristocracy in the Porfirian Foreign Service”. Book Manuscript Summary, available online at < <http://www.lclark.edu/~tepo/Papers/macias.pdf> >, consulted on 17 February 2014.

¹⁷⁹ GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 24-28; OTTE, “Outdoor relief”, 47-48.

¹⁸⁰ BRULEY, Yves, “Le diplomate idéal au XIXe siècle : un parangon de sociabilité”, in J.-P. CHALINE, *Élites et sociabilité*, 248.

¹⁸¹ In the AMBZ, both Delsemme and the 1960s and Roosens in the 1980s have consulted a now lost note written by a Foreign Ministry clerk just after the First World War. These *Essais sur quelques notions qui ont rapport à la diplomatie* included passages about the moral, physical and intellectual qualities required of Belgian diplomats, drawn from nineteenth century treatises on diplomacy. See DELSEMME, “Quelques aspects sociaux”, 13-14; and ROOSENS, “L’accès”, 140-141.

mastery of noble manners and dispositions. Surely, the government never formalised this social criterion for entry into the diplomatic corps, as this allowed the Foreign Minister and the King to maintain enough leverage in the selection process.¹⁸² A measure like that would also not have fit well with the democratic image that the government wanted to present to the public. Nevertheless, nobility was clearly an informal qualification: in correspondence about the admission of candidates to the diplomatic career, characteristics such as “honourable”, “sociable”, “tactful”, “well-bred”, and “presentable” were frequently noted.¹⁸³ In the selection process, the aristocratic moral values of modesty and discretion, and noble forms of self-presentation, which included polished speech, restrained phrasing, fine dress, and a courtly demeanour, seem to have carried as much weight as the aspirants’ personal wealth. According to Baron Beyens, diplomats might have rendered the best of services to the country’s commerce and industry, but if they did not possess this “aggregate of representative qualities”, they could never head a Belgian legation.¹⁸⁴

As indicated by the aforementioned statistics, simplistic as they may be, the attraction of diplomacy for the Belgian nobility seems to have worked in the other direction as well. Most historians who have studied the social stratifications of European foreign services before the First World War have argued that the awareness that diplomacy ranked among the few occupations suitable for the aristocracy, indeed functioned for many young people from socially prominent families as an important social incentive to embark upon a diplomatic career.¹⁸⁵ Given that foreign affairs largely remained a royal prerogative and that, consequently, court life held a central place within it, the world of diplomacy was a place where most aristocrats must have felt quite at home.

Having a noble pedigree that stemmed from at least the early seventeenth century, perhaps this consideration also ran through Kerchove’s mind. However, the count was not one of a still large but dwindling group of European noblemen who could or would live of the rents of their lands in a *dolce far niente*, and for whom careers in business and trade remained

¹⁸² DELSEMME, “Quelques aspects sociaux”, 13.

¹⁸³ The examples are drawn from the following personnel files at the AMBZ: PF 1559, “Charles de Romrée de Vichenet”, Werner van den Steen de Jehay to Léon Arendt, 30 March 1910; PF 1525, “Joseph Herry”, Note of Direction P, 29 June 1914; PF 1526, “Guy Heyndrickx”, Note of Direction P, 26 July 1909; PF 1812, “Ernest Kervyn de Meerendré”, Note of Direction P, 17 October 1912. For mid and late nineteenth century examples, see DELSEMME, “Quelques aspects sociaux”, 14-16; and ROOSENS, “L’accès”, 153-155.

¹⁸⁴ Baron Beyens quoted in ROOSENS, “L’accès”, 141.

¹⁸⁵ CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Corps*, 60-61; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 33-34; HAYNE, *The French Foreign Office*, 8. The studies about the late nineteenth and early twentieth century British diplomatic corps are practically silent about aspiring diplomats’ motivations to enter the Career. In her chapter on “The Diplomats”, Zara Steiner merely states that “embassy life did not attract the ambitious or the energetic”, see STEINER, *The Foreign Office*, 183. JONES, *The British Diplomatic Service*, does not say anything about the matter.

unacceptable, because they were associated with bourgeois morals and values. Rather, he was part of an ever growing number of Belgian and European aristocratic families that, during the nineteenth century, turned away from landownership alone and invested in more profitable, commercial activities.¹⁸⁶

An overwhelming majority of the forty (out of seventy-nine) Belgian diplomats of old noble lineage sprung from propertied families that seem to have been able to live of the rents of their lands.¹⁸⁷ About a third of these aristocrats had fathers who combined the management of their estates with the mayoralty of their village or with a place in the provincial council. This number dropped to one out of eight when it came to their fathers' political involvement at a national level, but regained its former level in the case of salaried state service.¹⁸⁸ Only a very limited number of these men seems to have had family ties with the worlds of Belgian commerce, finance and industry.¹⁸⁹ Apparently, most diplomats of the old nobility were born in those aristocratic families that held most strongly to their traditional ways of life.

The nineteen diplomats whose ancestors had been ennobled by the Belgian King, generally came from very different social-professional environments. Arguably, only a few had fathers who made substantial profits of their landed property. Half of them were raised in families of civil servants, who were employed by the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, War, or Arts and Sciences. The fathers of the other half were industrialists, four of whom combined this with a seat in the Chamber or the Senate.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ DE BELDER, "Veranderingen", 496-497; TILMAN, Samuel, *Les grands banquiers*, 100-104. WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 42-51. In his later life, Kerchove would become actively involved in the management of the glass and sugar companies founded by members of his mother's family. See KONINCKX, *De Belgische diplomatieke dienst*, 73.

¹⁸⁷ This information, indicatory rather than absolute, was obtained by a wide variety of sources, the most important of which are STENGERS, *Index*, passim. (lists the amount of total taxes paid and the separate amount of personal contribution. These give indications about the value of the landed property of diplomats' fathers); VANDERVELDE, Emile, *La propriété foncière en Belgique*, Paris, 1900, especially 87-88, 107, 125, 131-132, 154-155, 171, 180-182, 186-193, and 202 (states about some diplomats' fathers and families the number of hectares they possess and which annual rents these yield), and DUERLOO and JANSSENS, *Wapenboek*, 764 and 2076 (qualifies some diplomats's fathers as landowners based on letters patent of nobility).

¹⁸⁸ This information is drawn primarily from the EPNB.

¹⁸⁹ I have checked STENGERS, *Index*, who lists for every big tax payer the mandates that he held in large public limited companies; KONINCKX, *De Belgische diplomatieke dienst*, who mapped out the relations with commerce, finance, and industry for twenty of these forty diplomats and their families; KURGAN-VAN HENTENRIJK, Ginette et. al. (eds.), *Dictionnaire des patrons en Belgique. Les hommes, les entreprises, les réseaux*, Brussels, 1996, which provides biographies of nineteenth and twentieth century Belgian businessmen; and TILMAN, *Les grands banquiers*, who wrote a prosopography of Belgian bankers between 1830 and 1935. I have also checked the EPNB and the DUERLOO and JANSSENS, *Wapenboek*, for industrialists and bankers among noble diplomats' fathers. In addition to Kerchove, I have only been able to establish the involvement of Emile de Cartier's father in metallurgy, and prince Pierre de Caraman Chimay's father in coal mining, while Léon d'Ursel's directed a newspaper and seems to have been involved in the Société générale, and Buisseret's father was a shareholder in a local railway company.

¹⁹⁰ This information is drawn from the same sources as that on the diplomats of old noble lineage.

So far, the diplomats of bourgeois extraction have been somewhat neglected. Yet it would be interesting to know what social-professional backgrounds these men, twenty in number, came from. Among the eighteen (out of twenty) diplomats' fathers whose professional careers I have been able to trace, there were five lawyers (two of whom sat in both parliament and the government) and eight civil servants. At least one of the former and one of the latter were businessmen, just like the remaining five diplomats' fathers, two of whom were in catering, two more in banking, and one a textile industrialist.¹⁹¹

Simplifying these data a little, and grouping the inhabitants of the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island in 1911 according to the professions of their fathers, would lead to a division into three different tribes. The first assembled members of the landed aristocracy, while the second grouped sons of civil servants and the third was made up of diplomats coming from entrepreneurial milieus. During the foreign budget discussions in 1913, the liberal MP Maurice Crick claimed that members of the latter group “feel so uprooted [in the Belgian diplomatic corps] that they strain themselves to date their bourgeois descent back to the Crusades.”¹⁹²

However, the true aspirations of these men might have leaned closer towards those described as *Diplomatenadel* in Cecil's study of the German foreign service. This ‘diplomats’ nobility’ included sons of bourgeois industrialists and bankers who tried to enter the diplomatic corps because this was generally considered an aristocratic pursuit, and would thus bring them closer to their social superiors.¹⁹³ In late nineteenth century Belgium – and throughout Europe, for all that matter –, nouveaux riches from the worlds of commerce, finance and industry developed different strategies to obtain this kind of social mobility. One was to marry their daughters into families of the old nobility, another was to conform their lifestyles to the requirements of aristocratic sociability. This not only meant mingling with the nobility in salons and theatres, at balls and soirees, and in spas, it also implied sharing aristocratic passions for hunting and art collecting, and if possible acquiring a *château*. Several bourgeois businessmen seem to have pursued both strategies with considerable success.¹⁹⁴ Some of their sons presumably regarded becoming a diplomat as the culmination

¹⁹¹ This information is drawn from STENGERS, *Index*; KONINCKX, *De Belgische diplomatieke dienst*; KURGAN-VAN HENTENRIJK, *Dictionnaire des patrons*, 353-354, 457-458, 492-494, 501-502; and TILMAN, *Les grands banquiers*, 86, 92-93, 134, 195, 255, 262, 265, 349-350, 362-363; CHRISTIAENSEN, Stef, *Tussen klassieke en moderne criminele politiek : leven en beleid van Jules Lejeune*, Leuven, 2004, 30-34.

¹⁹² PHK, 12 June 1913, 1541.

¹⁹³ CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Service*, 63-64.

¹⁹⁴ See TILMAN, *Les grands banquiers*, 100-104 and 236-270; FILLIEUX, “Tenue de soirée de rigueur”, 43-51. For a European perspective, see WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 112-114.

of the latter strategy.¹⁹⁵ Before he entered the diplomatic corps in 1887, Charles Wauters had “manifested since many years a very pronounced attraction towards the diplomatic career.”¹⁹⁶ Eighteen years later, he read that he had obtained the rank of minister. It might have been his enthusiasm that led him to use personalised letter paper decorated with a little crown to express his gratitude to the Foreign Minister. The Political Director immediately pointed out to him “that he was not allowed to use the attributes of the nobility in his cachets, etc. not having obtained nor concession, nor recognition.”¹⁹⁷

Cecil also explains that German bourgeois diplomats, while seldom rising to the highest positions, sometimes managed to have their careers in diplomacy crowned with a noble title. Also in Belgium, diplomatic service could lead to ennoblement.¹⁹⁸ Contrary to the German situation, however, promotions seemed to have been less susceptible to aristocratic seniority. In 1901, the country’s most prestigious legations of London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Saint Petersburg counted among its chiefs only one whose aristocratic pedigree went back to the early modern period. Ironically enough, this diplomat was posted in republican France. Three others held noble titles, but these were granted to their fathers less than half a century earlier.¹⁹⁹

Yet the realization that men from comparatively more modest backgrounds had a fair chance of leading the country’s top legations did not prevent Paul de Groote, the Belgian minister in Teheran, from taking steps to prove his noble descent and thus obtain recognition of nobility. Unfortunately for him, De Groote’s pedigree could only be traced back to a commoner living in a village near Ghent in the seventeenth century. However, the person that De Groote ordered to conduct genealogical research on his behalf, was resourceful enough to create a link between his ancestor and a noble family from (present-day) Dutch Limburg whose line allegedly ran out in the mid-eighteenth century. Making use of an open space in the baptismal register, the genealogist inserted the marriage of Alexander de Groote, who had been conferred a *Freiherr*-title in 1613, with a certain Maria Hillaert, who was claimed to be a

¹⁹⁵ This was also the case for Raoul Warocqué, scion of an extremely wealthy entrepreneurs’ family who made part of the diplomatic corps for a while in the 1890s, and was sent on a special mission as ambassador extraordinary to China in 1910. See FILLIEUX, “Tenue de soirée de rigueur”, 53.

¹⁹⁶ AMBZ, PF 387, “Charles Wauters”, Raymond de Kerchove d’Exaerde to Julien Davignon, 23 December 1887.

¹⁹⁷ AMBZ, PF 387, “Charles Wauters”, f. 246, Note of Mr. Arendt, December 1905.

¹⁹⁸ Among the Belgian diplomats who had been conceded nobility during their careers: Charles Le Hon in 1836, Albert Goblet d’Alviella in 1838, Aldephonse du Jardin in 1848, Napoléon Alcindor Beaulieu in 1851, Jean-Baptiste Nothomb in 1853, Pierre Bartholeyns in 1857, Auguste Lambermont in 1863, Auguste Van Loo in 1873, Henry Solvyns and Edmond David de Gheest in 1875, Edouard Degrelle Rogier in 1891, Maurice Joostens in 1904, Léon Capelle in 1906.

¹⁹⁹ ADCB, 1901; and EPNB.

legal daughter of Rui Gomes da Silva, Duke of Pastrana and Estremera and Prince of Eboli. If the early twentieth century addition is held to be true, this marriage led to the birth of Paul de Groote's eldest known ancestor. In 1903, De Groote bundled all this information in a request to be conferred recognition of nobility. King Leopold II granted him the title of Baron, transferable to all descendants. Three years later, De Groote had his first-born son baptised Alexandre.²⁰⁰

A more frequently encountered practice among Belgian bourgeois diplomats, was the extension of their last names. Some contented themselves with a combination of both their parents' names, especially when their mother was born into the nobility. So Léon, son of Hubert Lemaire and Noémie de Warzée d'Hermalle, went through life as Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle, while Auguste Garnier's son Albert chose to be Albert Garnier-Heldewier, in reference to his mother Elvire's high birth.²⁰¹ Others tried harder to acquire the air of nobility. Jules Lejeune for instance, addressed a request to the King to have 'de Münsbach' added to his name, in reference to the Luxemburg village where his father had bought a large domain some decades earlier. In 1913, the Minister of Justice informed him that his request had been approved.²⁰²

Not all diplomats bothered to challenge the administrative roundabout in their quest for noble standing. However, like Charles Wauters, they did not get away with it. In 1909, Foreign Minister Davignon heard the protests of the count de Villermont against the "usurpation of the right to use the armorial bearings of the Villermont family."²⁰³ The purported usurper was Georges Allart, a Belgian senior diplomat. Repeatedly accused of and questioned about having the Villermont coat of arms printed on the menus of the dinner parties he had given as a chargé d'affaires at the Belgian legation in Luxemburg, Allart denied all charges. Davignon, however, remained unconvinced, and ordered the Political Direction to "inform M. Allart that he has placed the armorial bearings on his menus."²⁰⁴

Since Allart had recently divorced Villermont's niece, marital problems likely lay at the basis of the conflict. Still, this anecdote, as well as the others about bourgeois diplomats who aspired to noble standing, reveals the extent to which aristocratic manners and values continued to pervade the culture of the Belgian diplomatic corps and conditioned diplomatic

²⁰⁰ WEINBERG, Harry, "De familie De Groote. Heren van Oost, Strucht en Stevoort", *Adel aan Maas, Roer en Geul. Studies over de adelsgeschiedenis van Limburg*, 3, 2011, 173-175. I am grateful to Luc Duerloo for providing me with this reference. See also EPNB, 1989, 2, 262-263.

²⁰¹ *Nederlands Adelsboek*, 85, 1995, 47-51.

²⁰² ARA, I 147, "Papiers de Jules Le Jeune", n° 10, Henry Carton de Wiart to Jules Lejeune (de Münsbach), 22 September 1913.

²⁰³ AMBZ, PF, 4699, "Georges Allart", f. 236, Villermont to Davignon, 13 February 1909.

²⁰⁴ AMBZ, PF, 4699, "Georges Allart", f. 242, Note of the Foreign Minister, 20 March 1909.

sociability. It led diplomats to aspire to appropriate outward signs of aristocracy, since such forms of objectified social capital, they might have believed, would provide them fuller access to the highest circles of international society.

This helps to explain why young Kerchove felt self-confident enough to state that “I believe to have in me the stuff to make it in the Career”. In addition to his great fortune and noble title, Kerchove had indeed enjoyed the advantages of high birth and aristocratic education. To bring Bourdieu back in: Kerchove possessed the necessary embodied cultural capital to embark upon a diplomatic career. On Diplomatic Island, these incorporated types of knowledge and dispositions could be invested and converted into more capital, in this case more cultural capital, that could afterwards become embodied. In diplomacy, Kerchove and his wife could benefit from their upbringings – and from their personal wealth – to see different parts of the world, to dwell among like-minded people, and to engage with them in intellectual conversations. In many cases, such conversations could lead to the establishment of friendships and other social contacts and thus add to their personal networks. Perhaps, Kerchove might have figured, this kind of social capital could be useful in the future.

Marguerite, however, did not see it that way. While acknowledging that “doors in ‘Society’ will be opened”, she offered the counterargument that “the acquaintances and the friends that one makes will not last, and after a certain time, one has to leave for another city where one inevitably has to restart to create a new circle.” Marguerite could also accept that “the contact with numerous persons that are very different, come from other countries, have other customs, will open to us a greater horizon of ideas than the more quiet life that one will inevitably lead in one’s own country.” However, a career in diplomacy was not the best way to satisfy this desire, she added, explaining that “by leading one’s life as intellectually as possible, and by making from time to time a long journey that takes us away completely from our surroundings and our milieu, rather than small journeys that leave a fugitive impression, it is very well possible to avoid this kind of somnolence of the mind that has to overwhelm those who do not try to see and especially study other things, out of their own frame of reference.” Finally, Marguerite reassured her husband, “the diplomatic stuff” he had in him would never be lost, for “these were qualities that one could deploy regularly, without having to be abroad!”

The tension between bourgeois and aristocratic notions of the relation between private and public life pervades Marguerite’s argumentation. As a daughter of a bourgeois entrepreneur, she appears to have preferred to subsume travelling and making friends under

the private domain, so that they could be enjoyed more intensely, and might ultimately have required far less financial means. Kerchove, by contrast, most likely considered spending lavishly and socializing in environments that mixed private life and the public sphere, as essential parts of being an aristocrat.²⁰⁵ Yet Marguerite did present strong arguments that, at least to a certain extent, must have accommodated her husband's aspirations. So if Kerchove's marriage rested on the near-equality and mutual respect suggested by the tone of their letter, he would have to prove that, in the field of diplomacy, more was to be gained than evanescent social capital and embodied cultural capital that one could also acquire differently. Perhaps other gains lay in the structure and culture of the Belgian diplomatic career itself.

²⁰⁵ WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 51 and 100.

CHAPTER 2. THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRESTIGE

“In diplomacy”, Kerchove argued, “one is surrounded by an aura of glory and to become a minister is the ambition, and more than a dream to fulfil.” The structure of *la Carrière* led diplomats from the initial stages of attaché and second secretary along the road to glory via the stops of first secretary, advisor, and minister resident, to the final stage of minister plenipotentiary.²⁰⁶ Arriving at the top of the hierarchy, a diplomat could finally replace the black feathers in his hat with white ones. He might also have started to realize that he had little free space left on his costume to pin up the remaining decorations he was to receive.²⁰⁷ In the decades before the First World War, such institutionalised cultural capital, as Bourdieu called the aggregate of titles, decorations and other formally recognized cultural competences, appears to have conferred a certain dignity upon its bearers. Kerchove greatly valued these signs of distinction, but also realized that they had to be put on the scale against the costliness of a diplomatic career. He asked his wife (and himself): “Will we be able to enjoy our privileged position after having been more or less short of money our whole lives?”

The titles and decorations that diplomacy had in store for its careerists indeed required the investment of other forms of capital, not least the spending of large parts of one’s private fortune. However, one had to take care not to let one’s wealth diminish to the extent that it could no longer support the display of the acquired prestige. This chapter follows Belgian diplomats as they set sail for Diplomatic Island, arrived in the Belgian resort and started travelling on the island’s roads until they reached a place where they could conclude their journey in the most dignified manner. This chapter also studies how the roads of Diplomatic Island were connected during the decades before the First World War, and how their travellers deployed their assets to reach their desired destinations. The eventual aim is to find out what made the fruits of Diplomatic Island taste so sweet.

In addition to economic capital and embodied cultural capital, in the form of honourableness and presentability, access to the Belgian resort on the island and thus to these fruits, which in Bourdieuan terms are labelled types of institutionalised cultural capital, required other types of the same, namely certain university degrees and a document that certified one’s successful completion of the diplomatic exam. Yet meeting all these admission criteria did not guarantee entry into the Belgian diplomatic corps. Until after the First World

²⁰⁶ The official title was ‘minister plenipotentiary and envoy extraordinary’.

²⁰⁷ ADCB, 1901, 190-194.

War, only *attachés de légation* could take the diplomatic exam, and nomination to the first diplomatic echelon remained the prerogative of King and Foreign Minister.²⁰⁸

§ 1. The Ties That Bind

This is where the aspiring diplomats' social capital could make a difference. Those who had created, or more precisely, inherited strong networks could easily find authoritative personalities to plead their cases. Surely, personal ties would prove more effective if they included persons who had the ears of the upper decision-makers. This particularly benefited family members of diplomats, of Foreign Ministry officials, of leading politicians, and of the high nobility. Before looking into the amounts of social capital that aspiring diplomats possessed, and how they applied it to enter the diplomatic corps and to obtain swift promotions, we need to know how the power of decision about access to the Career was divided between the King, the Foreign Minister and the leading officials at the Department.

The Power That Is

Ever since their dynasty ascended the throne in 1831, the Belgian kings possessed considerable leverage to impose their preferences as to diplomatic personnel. On the one hand, the Belgian Constitution explicitly stipulated that the King named all foreign policy personnel. Certainly, this royal privilege was limited by the constitutional requirement that each act of the King needed to be co-signed by the Foreign Minister.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the King had to give his approval, and did not show himself inclined to have his formal authority undermined. On the other hand, no strong opposition existed to the King's control over diplomacy. The leaders of the revolutionary state indeed quickly realized that to safeguard Belgium's relatively democratic institutions in a European system dominated by a socially and ideologically homogenous aristocratic elite, it needed a head of state who would be accepted by these international policy-makers and who could make his way among them. A German-born aristocrat, widower of a British crown princess, former officer in the Russian army, friend of Metternich, and future husband of the King of France's daughter, Leopold I was the ideal man to solidify Belgium's independence. His political conservatism and sincere

²⁰⁸ *Pasinomie: collection complète des lois, décrets, arrêtés et règlements généraux qui peuvent être invoqués en Belgique*, Brussels, 1914, n° 208, 331.

²⁰⁹ *De Belgische grondwet van 7 februari 1831 met de wijzigingen van 7 september 1893, 15 november 1920, 7 februari, 24 augustus en 15 oktober 1921*, Brussels, 1965, 17 (articles 64 and 66).

belief in the benefits of the Concert of Vienna would help to gain the new monarchy some international respectability. These expectations were essentially realized when the country was spared the revolutionary agitation that spread across the continent in 1848.²¹⁰

Inspired by the conviction that sovereignty over the state resided in the King rather than in the nation, Leopold I conducted a personal diplomacy as a mediator in European conflicts. He used the Belgian diplomats as his private agents and therefore wished to decide himself over appointments of foreign policy personnel.²¹¹ In doing so, he successfully opposed the institutionalization of the diplomatic career through the introduction of a hierarchy of diplomats according to seniority.²¹² This safeguarded his autonomy in deciding which diplomats to appoint to the most important legations. The rapid succession of twelve Foreign Ministers during the first sixteen years of his reign contributed to consolidating Leopold I's authority over the diplomatic personnel.²¹³ Not that problems would have arisen otherwise. Throughout his reign, Belgium's revolutionary diplomats remained very loyal to the King's ideas about European politics. Leopold I thanked most of these men by elevating them to nobility and by naming them to the country's principal postings.²¹⁴ Nevertheless, the first King of the Belgians was well aware that in some European capitals, effective representation of the young monarchy required conservative aristocrats with respectable pedigrees. In a letter to Metternich, Leopold I therefore recommended Baron de Loé, his first minister to Austria-Hungary as one who "had nothing to do with the revolution or revolutions, and will never be but the envoy of his sovereign".²¹⁵ The King also applauded the decisions of members of the oldest noble families to serve the country abroad, even if during the first years of Belgian independence, the orangist sympathies of many of these aristocrats had led them to ignore Leopold and to refuse to appear at court. Prince Eugène de Ligne provides the most notorious example of these shifting loyalties. While in 1834, Ligne still felt he had to warn Metternich that "the sovereign of that country is no more than the beacon of anarchy, a front shield-bearer of revolutionary propaganda," from 1838 until 1848 he made amends by

²¹⁰ VIAENE, Vincent, "De monarchie en de stelling van België in Europa onder Leopold I en Leopold II (1831-1909)", in Gustaaf JANSSENS, and Jean STENGERS (eds.), *Nieuw licht op Leopold I en Leopold II. Het Archief Goffinet*, Brussels, 1997, 151; COOLSAET, *België*, 105.

²¹¹ VIAENE, "Leopold I", 126-130

²¹² ROOSENS, "Agents diplomatiques", 112-113.

²¹³ ADCB, 1901, 42.

²¹⁴ Delsemme lists two roturiers created count, seven (including Eugène Beyens, whose ancestors had been conceded nobility in 1647) created baron; and two mere ennoblements. Sylvain Van de Weyer, head of mission in London from the early 1830s to the late 1860s, allegedly refused the title of count, stating that rather than obtaining a title, he wished to make himself a name. See DELSEMME, "Quelques aspects sociaux", 30.

²¹⁵ Leopold I quoted in COOLSAET, *België*, 60.

spending an annual 160,000 frs. of his private fortune as the King's ambassador to the court of Leopold's father-in-law, the French King Louis-Philippe.²¹⁶

By the time Leopold II succeeded his father in late 1865, the rise of nationalism throughout the continent and processes of democratization in different European countries, and to a minor extent in Belgium, seem to have limited the King's competence in foreign policy matters. In a world where the nation came to represent the legitimacy of the state and political discourse leaned ever more towards enhancing the nation's territorial and military power, the King of a small country did best not to draw too much attention to himself. While in the last years of his life, Leopold I had many difficulties adapting to the changed situation, often to the irritation of some of his ministers, Leopold II would – albeit very gradually – embrace the government stance of maintaining a policy of strict neutrality on the European political scene.²¹⁷ This contributed to increasing the authority of the Foreign Ministers over the Department. Consequently, they could hold on to their post longer, only five politicians serving as Foreign Minister between 1871 and 1895. Especially during the last liberal government, from 1878 until 1884, Foreign Minister Walthère Frère Orban managed to further reduce the King's autonomy as an actor in European politics.²¹⁸

In the meantime, Leopold II had probably already decided to leave European diplomacy to the Foreign Ministry. He focused ever more on overseas expansion, a goal he had coveted since his early adulthood and which he achieved in 1885, when he gained personal sovereignty over the Congo Free State. The next chapter will deal more extensively with the implications for the diplomatic corps of this transformation of Belgium into the metropolis of an empire. For now, it suffices to indicate that the whole process of acquiring this large territory in Central Africa was greatly facilitated by the machinations and information gathering of a network that counted among its members quite a few Belgian diplomats, nearly all of bourgeois extraction.²¹⁹ However, due to Leopold II's mismanagement of the Congo and his absolutist rule over the colony, many of his former

²¹⁶ DELSEMME, "Quelques aspects sociaux", 26-28; VIAENE, "Leopold I", 129.

²¹⁷ VIAENE, "De monarchie", 152-154; COOLSAET, *België*, 115 and 131-133.

²¹⁸ ADCB, 1901, 42; LUBELSKI-BERNARD, Nadine, *Léopold II et le cabinet Frère-Orban (1878-1884). Correspondance entre le roi et ses ministres*, Leuven-Brussels, 1983, 29-30.

²¹⁹ See VANDERSMISSEN, Jan, *Koningen van de wereld. De aardrijkskundige beweging en de ontwikkeling van de koloniale doctrine van Leopold II*, Ghent, 2008, 287-465 (especially 396-438). Vandersmissen has unraveled the network that aided the crown prince and later King Leopold II to materialize his colonialist aspirations. It included the diplomats Edouard Blondeel van Cuelebrouck, Baron Eugène Beyens, Emile de Borchgrave, Baron Aldephonse du Jardin, Baron Jules Greindl, Baron Paul Guillaume, Joseph Jooris, Baron Auguste Lambermont, Baron Jean-Baptiste Nothomb, Baron Henri Solvyns, and Sylvain van de Weyer. These baronial dignities all dated from after 1830. De Borchgrave would receive one in 1896. Blondeel en Jooris were never ennobled. See EPNB.

allies in the Foreign Ministry withdrew their support of his policies. These included secretary-general Lambermont, Director of the Archives Emile Banning, and Baron Jules Greindl, the Belgian minister plenipotentiary in Berlin. As the country's main European foreign policy executives, they had often needed to strain themselves to soften the repercussions of Leopold II's colonial ambitions on the relations with Belgium's neighbours. The King's projects to further expand his overseas empire indeed jeopardized the country's neutrality, something that the top diplomats wanted to avoid at all costs.²²⁰

In 1895, Lambermont and Banning fervently supported an attempt to devolve the sovereignty over the Congo from the King to the Belgian state. Parliament's rejection of the transfer led to the resignation of count Henri de Merode-Westerloo as Foreign Minister.²²¹ Leopold II immediately re-established his authority over the department by appointing Interior Minister Jules de Burlet as head of the Foreign Ministry and by inciting Burlet to take with him his *chef de cabinet* Léon van der Elst, an expert in colonial matters and a royal confidant. The nominations of these men provide insights into the extent to which the King still controlled diplomatic personnel policy in the decades before the First World War.

Loyal to his King and indifferent as to what happened outside of Belgium, Burlet posed no threat to the monarch's colonial projects.²²² From the mid-1890s until the death of Leopold II in late 1909, these characteristics determined whether or not the King would accept any politician as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Burlet only headed the department for six months, after which he had to resign due to illness and was sent by Leopold II for recovery to Lisbon as minister plenipotentiary.²²³ His successor Baron Paul de Favereau displayed more interest and industriousness in the making and execution of Belgian foreign policy, but also took care not to oppose Leopold II's overseas ambitions. While consistently defending the King's colonial projects against increasing national and international criticisms, he managed to consolidate Belgium's economic diplomacy in the rest of the world. His loyalty earned him the title of Minister of State at his departure from the Foreign Ministry in the spring of

²²⁰ COOLSAET, *België*, 152-156; WILLEQUET, Jacques, *Le Baron Lambermont*, Brussels, 1971, 95-114; Id., *Le Congo belge et la Weltpolitik, 1894-1914*, Paris, 1962, passim.

²²¹ VANTHEMSCHE, Guy, *Congo. De impact van de kolonie op België*, Tiel, 2007, 48-49; WILLEQUET, *Le Baron Lambermont*, 112-114.

²²² According to Van der Elst, Burlet regularly exhibited his lack of interest in foreign policy during meetings with the top officials of the department. See GAR, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 275, *Ecrits divers de L. van der Elst*, 2. During the 1895 foreign budget discussions in parliament, he even dozed off, see PHK, 5 July 1895, 2080.

²²³ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 275, *Ecrits divers de L. van der Elst*, 2-3; AR, 1897, 28.

1907.²²⁴ Van der Elst appears to have been charged with finding a new politician to lead the department. Not an easy task, he wrote in his memoirs, “because fear of conflicts with His Majesty made everyone recoil from accepting”. Leopold II only complicated the search by not indicating any preference, except for “a flexible minister that obeyed him without arguing.” He also warned Van der Elst that, if he did not find anyone, he would have to give up his office of secretary-general and become Foreign Minister himself. Van der Elst eventually found what the King was looking for in his old friend Julien Davignon, whom Van der Elst described as “completely ignorant about international politics.”²²⁵ In his memoirs, Pierre Orts reported that Leopold II was quite happy with the new Foreign Minister: “He considered him, with reason, to be perfectly harmless. He said of him: ‘I am very satisfied with my Minister of Foreign Affairs, for he is a man of works’”. However, Orts explained, the King’s wink did not refer to Davignon’s professional diligence but to his religious devotion.²²⁶

While Orts’s harsh judgment of Davignon’s qualities was likely an overstatement partly caused by his staunchly anticlerical convictions, it is nevertheless clear that especially from 1895 onwards, the King rather than the Foreign Minister ruled the roost at the Foreign Ministry. This directly affected the career opportunities of the administrative personnel. For Leopold II, congeniality rather than indifference determined the liability for promotion of the Department’s officials. In the spring of 1895, the King signed a royal decree naming Léon van der Elst as *chef de cabinet* of the Foreign Minister. As such, he secured this posting for a confidant whose devotion he had consolidated a few months earlier, when he elevated Van der Elst to nobility.²²⁷ After Burlet’s departure from the Ministry, Van der Elst stayed at his post to second Favereau. Aware that the office of *chef de cabinet* had accrued to members of the diplomatic corps ever since its institution in the early 1870s, Van der Elst noted in his memoirs that “my arrival at the Foreign Ministry as *chef de cabinet* was a disappointment to a few diplomats that knew the post.” He also realized that “those who had supported the Count de Mérode in his struggle with the King, would not have been happier with my nomination than with the one of M. de Burlet... They had sensed that vis-à-vis the Sovereign, they had lost everything.” These people probably knew that Van der Elst unconditionally supported the point of view of the King, whom he kept admiring and defending until his death in 1933.²²⁸

²²⁴ See COOLSAET, *België*, 175-176. See also WILLEQUET, *Le Congo belge*, 12-190; and JADOT, Jules, “Favereau (de) (Paul...)”, *BCB*, 4, 1955, 292-295.

²²⁵ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 275, *Ecrits divers de L. van der Elst*, 10-10b.

²²⁶ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 25.

²²⁷ DUERLOO and JANSSENS, *Wapenboek*, 639.

²²⁸ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 275, *Ecrits divers de L. van der Elst*, 1-2 and 4-6. In his memoirs, that he probably wrote in the late 1920s, Van der Elst also explained that “The Congo in those days

This loyalty earned Van der Elst the office of secretary-general in 1905. Normally, it would have fallen to one of the department's top officials. In order of seniority, these were Chancellery Director Alfred Van den Bulcke, Political Director Léon Arendt, and Commercial Director Léon Capelle.²²⁹ The career perspectives of Van den Bulcke had looked very bright in the late 1870s and early 1880s, when he served as Frère-Orban's *chef de cabinet*. However, more than twenty years of Catholic government had gravely impeded his clambering the bureaucratic ladder. Possibly frustrated because of another setback, Van den Bulcke appealed to a Liberal senator to denounce this type of 'Catholic favouritism' at the foreign budget discussions in parliament. Favereau responded by extolling Van der Elst's qualities.²³⁰ Not only did the Foreign Minister regard Van der Elst as a very close friend, he might also have realized that it was better not to invoke the authority of the King in a matter where the sovereign's actual influence was far greater than his constitutional competences.

Although second in line, Arendt most likely knew that the top office could not have gone to him, as he seems to have agreed with his friend Greindl that authority over the Congo should be devolved upon the Belgian government.²³¹ It is unclear whether Arendt already felt this way nine years earlier, when he was promoted to Political Director. In those days, however, he was far less disliked by the King than Emile Banning, the only other director at the department who was Arendt's equal in rank and senior in length of service. Banning had fallen out of the royal grace in 1893, after publishing several critical comments on Leopold II's Congo policy. One of these led the King to ostentatiously turn his back on Banning at a New Year's reception, and elicited from him the comment that "I can accept that one does not agree with me, but I want that one, in telling me, does not forget that I am the King."²³²

This quote seems to have perfectly captured Leopold II's stance after the death of Lambermont in 1905 as well. Van der Elst noted that "because the other chiefs of the most important services [i.e. Arendt and Van den Bulcke] were no longer *persona grata* by the King", Capelle had been in pole position to succeed Lambermont. However, several of the Commercial Director's colleagues had told Favereau that they refused to serve under Capelle

was an Independent State. The bounds that united its Sovereign and the one of Belgium, were personal. The Belgian Government thus had no right to control the actions of the Congolese administration, and was not responsible for them." (p. 4) In the early 1920s, he published several articles that cast a very favourable light on Leopold II's imperialist projects. See VAN DER ELST, Léon, "Souvenirs sur Léopold II" and "Leopold II et la Chine", both in *La Revue générale*, respectively 56/109, 1923, 249-269, and 57/111, 1924, 410-437 and 570-597.

²²⁹ For their careers, see ADCB, 1905, 116-117; AR, 1870-1905.

²³⁰ PHS, 7 June 1905, 534; ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 275, *Ecrits divers de L. van der Elst*, 9-10.

²³¹ See the letter from Arendt to Favereau of 1 August 1906, quoted in WILLEQUET, *Le Congo belge*, 80.

²³² Leopold II de Belgique quoted in WILLEQUET, *Le Baron Lambermont*, 109.

because he counted less years of service than them. So after the King “declared to the minister that he would only agree upon my [Van der Elst’s] nomination or that of Capelle”, Van der Elst got the job.²³³ Less than two months later, Leopold II elevated Capelle to nobility, which might have made the pill easier to swallow.²³⁴

Between 1895 and 1910, Leopold II ultimately decided who would act as his Foreign Minister, and who would second this politician in day-to-day policy matters. However, this does not imply that Leopold II controlled the access to the diplomatic corps all by himself. Two top officials at the Department held key intermediary positions between the applicants to the diplomatic career and the Foreign Minister and the King as upper-decision makers. One was the Political Director, a position held by Léon Arendt from 1896 until 1912, the other the Secretary-General. Son of a university professor, Arendt had entered the Foreign Ministry in 1870, aged twenty-seven years old and fresh out of college with doctoral degrees in law and in political sciences in his hand. Having clambered up the social ladder for over twenty-five years, he was appointed *Directeur générale de la Politique* after the death of his predecessor in 1896.²³⁵ This function put him in charge of day-to-day foreign policy execution and of the men abroad. Within the department, Arendt had to give account only to the Secretary-General and to the Foreign Minister.²³⁶ From 1859 until his death in March 1905, the office of secretary-general was held by Baron Auguste Lambermont. Contemporaries considered Lambermont, rather than the Foreign Minister, as the true head of the Foreign Affairs department. Van der Elst, his successor, described Lambermont in his unpublished memoirs as “the venerated mentor of the house... Everyone listened to his counsels and followed his advice with scrupulous docility: Roma locuta est.”²³⁷ Although Lambermont arguably continued to exude supreme authority over the administrative personnel, during the last decade of his long life he seems to have engaged himself primarily in politics of arbitrage between colonial powers and in teaching diplomatic history, international relations, and colonial politics to the Belgian crown prince Albert. Matters of access to the diplomatic corps did not seem to have occupied much of his attention any more.²³⁸ This allowed Arendt to

²³³ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 275, *Ecrits divers de L. van der Elst*, p. 8.

²³⁴ DUERLOO and JANSSENS, *Wapenboek*, 346.

²³⁵ WILLEQUET, Jacques, “Arendt”, *BN*, 30, 1958, 79-81.

²³⁶ AR, 1896, 129-130.

²³⁷ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 275, *Ecrits divers de L. van der Elst*, p. 1-2. For Lambermont, see WILLEQUET, Jacques, *Le Baron Lambermont*, Brussels, 1971. Lambermont deserves a new, less hagiographic biography. Some corrections to the image that Willequet propagates are to be found in DELSEMME, *Contributions*, 204-207. For Van der Elst, see VANDEWOUDE, Emile, “Elst, baron Léon”, *BN*, 43, 1983, 385-398.

²³⁸ This argument is based on the absence of any reference to Lambermont in archival documents concerning personnel policy on the one hand, and on information found in WILLEQUET, *Le Baron Lambermont*, 115-144

gradually strengthen his grip on recruitment policy and personnel management within the Foreign Ministry.

How the Ties Are Bound

To enter the diplomatic career, it helped to know people who were close to the locus of power. The men who constituted the Belgian diplomatic corps in the spring of 1911 possessed various amounts of such social capital. In this section, I will try to chart their connections with the royal palace, with other diplomats, with top officials at the Foreign Ministry, and with leading politicians. Although I have drawn the information about these diplomats' networks from a wide variety of sources, the picture thus created will necessarily be indicative rather than complete, for it is impossible to track down all their family and friendship ties.²³⁹ I have also chosen to take into account only those who entered the diplomatic corps from the summer of 1884 onwards. This group includes sixty-nine of the seventy-nine diplomats active in the spring of 1911.

While none of these men were bound to the royal family by blood or by marriage, several had family members who were or had been attached to one of the royal houses at the time they had entered the diplomatic corps. Not that many, though. In addition to four diplomats who had an aunt or an uncle in the Queen's house, only three others could really be considered tied up to the royal palace. One was Count Philippe d'Oultremont. When he joined the diplomatic corps in the spring of 1903, his uncle John was the Grand Marshall of the Court, his sister Elisabeth a lady-in-waiting of the future queen, and his father Théodore a former ordinance officer and aide-de-camp to the King's brother.²⁴⁰ The other two were Count Robert van der Straten-Ponthoz and Count Léon d'Ursel. Van der Straten entered the Career in late 1901, two years after the death of his grandfather Ignace, a former ordinance officer and aide-de-camp of Leopold II. Together with his brother Théodore, who was Grand Marshall of the Court until his death in 1889, Ignace had served the Belgian Kings since the

(especially 123 and 137), on the other hand. These data lead me not to accept Willequet's unfounded statement that Lambermont personally dealt with all personnel management issues until his death in 1905. My conviction is strengthened by the set-up of the concerned chapter, in which Willequet limits himself to linking eulogies of Lambermont written after his death, by means of short paragraphs in which he expresses his approval of these homages. Footnotes are lacking throughout the book. See also VELAERS, Jan, *Albert I. Koning in tijden van oorlog en crisis 1909-1934*, Tielt, 2009, 78.

²³⁹ I have cross-checked the *Almanach Royal* and the *Annuaire Diplomatique* only taken into account family ties as revealed in the *Etat Présent de la Noblesse Belge* supplemented with prosopographic information found in diplomatic personnel files and private papers.

²⁴⁰ EPNB, 1995, 290-311; AR, 1840-1844, 1911; ADCB, 1910.

1850s.²⁴¹ When D’Ursel solicited the nomination of attaché de légation in 1890, his mother had been in charge of the queen’s household ever since Leopold II ascended the throne in 1865.²⁴² Surely, it is no coincidence that these three diplomats (and the four others as well) belonged to the highest ranks of the nobility, holding count’s titles and coming from families whose aristocratic lineage predated the mid-sixteenth century.²⁴³ Although such types of institutionalised social capital did not entail any juridical privilege whatsoever, in a country where the King topped the noble hierarchy, monarchical traditions might have required him to fill his household with those immediately below him, while aristocratic sensitivities might have added to restricting his social circle to these people, and often to their benefit.

In the spring of 1911, nineteen out of sixty-nine diplomats who had entered the career from 1884 onwards, had fathers who were or had been members of the diplomatic corps. Eleven of these men had obtained the rank of minister, which entitled them to head a legation. Four were sons of diplomats who had pursued the career until becoming advisor, that is for at least eight years, while the other four had fathers who spent some time in European capitals as legation attachés.²⁴⁴ For aspiring diplomats, the presence of fathers and other relatives might have functioned as a pole of attraction towards the Career, not only because of family traditions but also due to the career advantages of having family members in high positions in the Foreign Ministry or in the diplomatic corps.²⁴⁵ Sons of Belgian diplomats who aspired to a career in diplomacy generally invoked the service their fathers had rendered to the country and expressed the belief that they would be able to follow in their footsteps.²⁴⁶

That foreign service in Belgium on the eve of the First World War very much remained a family affair becomes even clearer when taking into account relatives in the second, third, fourth, and higher degrees who shared the family name.²⁴⁷ At Kerchove’s time of writing, the diplomatic corps counted three pairs of siblings and two diplomats whose

²⁴¹ EPNB, 1999, 107-120; AR, 1840-1902.

²⁴² EPNB, 2000, 1-13; AR, 1866-1890.

²⁴³ However, the letters patent of nobility allegedly conceded to an ancestor of Van der Straten in 1513, as Hervé Douchamps showed in 1992, were nineteenth-century forgeries. See DOUXCHAMPS, Hervé, “Les diplômes de noblesse de la famille van der Straten-Waillet-Ponthoz. Étude critique”, *Le Parchemin*, 57/278, 1992, 92.

²⁴⁴ See EPNB and AR. A Royal Decree from 15 October 1842, which stood until after the First World War, stipulated that advisors needed to have passed at least three years in the rank of second secretary, and another five as first secretary. See ADCB, 1901, 191.

²⁴⁵ DASQUE, “A la recherche de M. de Norpois”, 269-270; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 35-36.

²⁴⁶ AMBZ, PF 31, “Eugène-Napoléon Beyens”, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Guillaume d’Aspremont-Lynden, 20 February 1877; PF 139, “Paul de Groote”, Paul de Groote to Joseph Riquet de Caraman Chimay, 18 October 1884 and 4 September 1885; PF 122, “Albert Garnier-Heldewier”, Albert Garnier-Heldewier to Joseph Riquet de Caraman Chimay, 25 January 1889.

²⁴⁷ This seems to have been the case for European diplomacy in general. In France, for instance, about a fifth of all diplomats active between 1871 and 1914 were sons of diplomats, see DASQUE, “A la recherche de M. de Norpois”, 269-270.

brothers had left the career. Ten diplomats were preceded by at least one uncle or one cousin, whereas four others followed in the footsteps of their grandfathers. In addition, many had great-uncles as well as second and third cousins who once represented the country abroad, not to mention the diplomats or former diplomats in their wives' and mothers' families. While Kerchove was the first of his name to enter the diplomatic corps, his marriage at once embedded him in the world of Belgian diplomacy. Marguerite's uncle Léon was in charge of the legation in Rome, while her cousin Charles held the office of first secretary in Stockholm and the husband of Charles' sister had just been put in charge of the Belgian mission in Tokyo.²⁴⁸ Things could also get more complicated. Philippe d'Oultremont, for instance, was a first cousin, twice removed, of Count Emile d'Oultremont de Wégimont de Warfusée, Belgium's head of mission in Rome from the late 1830s to the mid-1840s. In the final years of his short diplomatic career, Emile's son Charles, that is Philippe's second cousin, once removed, was attached to his legation. Philippe's second cousin Adhémar served as an attaché and a second secretary in the 1880s. Within his closer family circle, Philippe had been preceded in the diplomatic career by his uncle Ferdinand. He might also have been inspired by exciting adventures of diplomatic social life told at the family dinner table by the husbands of his aunts. Two of these spent several years abroad in Belgian legations while the older brother of a third one had headed the mission in London for fifteen years when young Philippe joined the diplomatic corps in the spring of 1903.²⁴⁹ In times when intergenerational persistence characterized most professions, both those associated with the elites and those associated with the common people, this was in no way exceptional.²⁵⁰ It does, however, add to the closeness and exclusiveness of a career in diplomacy.

In the decades before the First World War, the men handling day-to-day business in the Foreign Affairs Department remained rather limited in quantity, although their numbers increased from twenty-six in January 1885 to forty-one in February 1911. Of these men, four, respectively five, were directors-general in 1885 and 1911. Together with the secretary-general and the chef de cabinet, they constituted the upper crust of the administrative personnel. The share of members of the diplomatic corps attached to the Department's administration, which meant they worked in Brussels and not in postings abroad, decreased

²⁴⁸ EPNB, 1988, 226-229, and 1991, 323-325; AR, 1911; ADCB, 1910.

²⁴⁹ EPNB, 1995, 290-311; AR, 1840-1844, 1911; ADCB, 1910. Four months later, baron Henri de Woelmont, Philippe's cousin by the marriage of his uncle, would follow in his footsteps, whereas two years later, his third cousin Arnould did the same. He was a legation attaché for over five years when death caught him just a week before his twenty-ninth birthday in August 1910.

²⁵⁰ See for instance VERMEULEN, Anne-Marie, "De huwelijksacten van de burgerlijke stand als bron voor de sociaal-economische geschiedschrijving. Beroepsoriëntatie en sociale homogamie in het 19de-eeuwse Gent", *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 24, 1985, 203-222.

from more than a quarter in 1885 to less than five per cent twenty-six years later. More importantly, whereas in the mid-1880s the entire Political Direction, the Secretary-General and the *chef de cabinet* were career diplomats – and even the Foreign Minister had been one – in 1911 only the *chef de cabinet* belonged to the diplomatic corps.²⁵¹ The rising prominence of an ‘administrative career’, however, did not prevent aspiring diplomats from using their ties with the Department to enter the diplomatic corps. Just as Foreign Minister Prince Joseph Riquet de Caraman-Chimay facilitated the entry of his second son Pierre in late 1884, Foreign Minister Julien Davignon did the same with his second son Jacques in late 1911.²⁵² Sometime in between, René van der Elst benefited from the presence of his uncle Léon in the Department, while Pierre Orts and other diplomats of liberal families could count on Alfred van den Bulcke to introduce them to the Foreign Minister.²⁵³ Such an introduction would have been unnecessary for Count Robert van der Straten-Ponthoz, nephew to a director-general and son of a diplomat who had been *chef de cabinet* from the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s.²⁵⁴

In the previous chapter, I have given impressions of the ties that Belgian diplomats active in the spring of 1911 had with parliament and with the government. Completing the picture for those who entered the diplomatic career from the summer of 1884 onwards, leads to the conclusion that the worlds of politics and diplomacy were not as interwoven as during the first half century of Belgian independence. Until 1848, the Belgian foreign service counted many elected parliamentarians among its ranks. When important debates took place in the Chamber or in the Senate, or when upcoming elections required campaigning, these men would just leave their postings and return to Brussels, or to their constituencies. After the adoption in 1848 of an Act that forbid combining salaried state service with membership of parliament, some politician-diplomats held on to their seat in Brussels, while others opted for serving the country abroad. However, the practice of designating former leading politicians to important legations only gradually waned during the following decades, and never completely disappeared.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, apart from Burlet’s short stay in Lisbon between 1884 and 1911 all diplomatic positions in Belgian legations were occupied by career diplomats.²⁵⁶ The practice of Belgian diplomacy had indeed turned into a career whose viability largely

²⁵¹ AR, 1885, 183-186; 1911, 166-172.

²⁵² EPNB, 1997, 121-128, and 1987, 225-229; ADCB, 1901, 101, and 1913-14, 139.

²⁵³ EPNB, 1988, 108-113; ADCB, 1905, 121; AMBZ, PF 1535, “Pierre Orts”, Note of Direction P, 24 November 1898; and AMBZ, PF 1421, “Charles Symon”, Note of Direction P, 27 July 1903.

²⁵⁴ EPNB, 1999, 107-120; ADCB, 1901, 123; AR, 1880-1902.

²⁵⁵ DELSEMME, *Contribution*, 173-177; id., “Quelques aspects sociaux”, 33-34; ROOSENS, “Agents diplomatiques”, 113-116; id., “L’accès”, 163-165.

²⁵⁶ AR, 1884-1911.

depended upon the assurance it could provide to aspiring careerists that their investments in time and money, would eventually pay off.

Connections between the diplomatic corps and the realm of national politics thus ran primarily along family lines and friendships. In addition to the aforementioned Prince Pierre de Caraman-Chimay, five diplomats had fathers who were senators at the time they joined the diplomatic corps, while one had a father elected in the Chamber. Two diplomats had a grandfather, two others an uncle and one a brother still active in the Senate. Eleven out of sixty-nine thus had a foot in parliament. However, if we add family members who had already left the legislating assemblies at the time the diplomats became *attaché de légation*, these numbers rise to nine fathers, twenty-three grandfathers, nine uncles, and one brother. The whole was divided among twenty-six diplomats.²⁵⁷

However, given the division of power over the access to the diplomatic career, these links with the world of national politics were far less important than the ones aspiring diplomats had with the Royal Palace. Given that also the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors held considerable authority over diplomatic personnel issues, a lot more than for instance the British Kings and Queen, the Belgian case again bore close resemblance to the imperial model.²⁵⁸ At any rate, aspiring travellers to the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island were confronted with what looked like a premodern power structure dominated by a dynastic Ruler. Such power structure corresponded well with their own social profiles.

§ 2. Sampling the Atmosphere

Kerchove took his first steps in diplomacy about three years before he decided to pursue it as a career. After obtaining his doctoral degree in law in the summer of 1908, he solicited the nomination of *attaché de légation*. In a letter to Political Director Léon Arendt, he let it be understood that he wanted the title as soon as possible, in order to deploy it on a journey around the world that he planned to undertake. Although Arendt claimed not to understand how such a title could serve Kerchove on his journey, he seemed disposed to submit the request to the Foreign Minister. However, he did so only on the strict condition that Kerchove

²⁵⁷ This information is based on cross-checking AR, ADCB, and EPNB with lists of elected parliamentarians (including their terms in the Chamber and the Senate) published in GERARD, Emmanuel, et al. (eds.), *Geschiedenis van de Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers 1830-2002*, Brussels, 2003, 460-513; and LAUREYS, Véronique, et al. (eds.), *De geschiedenis van de Belgische Senaat*, Tielt, 1999, 381-450.

²⁵⁸ See CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Service*, 190-225; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 9-10, 58 and 165-169; and JONES, *The British Diplomatic Service*, 189-192.

would be away for no longer than a few months, take his training at the department immediately upon his return, and present himself at the next session of the diplomatic exam. “Diplomatic titles are not created to decorate globetrotters,” Arendt argued, adding that there was no need for “another strolling attaché.”²⁵⁹

The Political Director alluded to an established practice in dealing with requests from young men, aristocrats and bourgeois alike, whose parents possessed great wealth and who solicited the title of legation attaché merely “in order to shine in the great world”.²⁶⁰ Without taking the diplomatic exam or embarking upon a diplomatic career, for a while they did form part of Belgium’s legation personnel. Martine Delseemme has calculated that well over half of all diplomats who entered the career as attaché between 1831 and 1850, belonged to this group. In 1853, the department asked all these men about their intentions towards pursuing the diplomatic career. By then, many of them had left the legations to which they were attached more than ten years earlier; some had never even showed up there.²⁶¹ While their numbers decreased during the late nineteenth century, the practice remained in custom and largely accepted by diplomats in the field. This might have had something to do with the close family ties between these amateur attachés and Belgian heads of mission, as well as with their often high aristocratic descent, which added to the overall prestige of the legation.²⁶²

However, at the time that Kerchove requested to be named attaché, things had slightly changed. The young count knew that, to stand a chance, he had to present the required university degrees and manifest his intention to truly embark upon a diplomatic career some time afterwards. Yet even this did not entirely suffice, as becomes clear from a letter of Albert de Bassompierre, an ambitious clerk at the Political Direction, to baron Henri de Woelmont, a first secretary who was recently named at the legation in Tokyo.²⁶³ According to Bassompierre, Arendt had told him to give Woelmont “a bit of news to communicate to your chief with some additional explanations”, namely that “your legation will be reinforced with

²⁵⁹ AMBZ, PF 1529, “André de Kerchove de Denterghem”, André de Kerchove to Julien Davignon, 29 July 1908; Note of Direction P, 31 July 1908.

²⁶⁰ DELSEMME, *Contribution*, 159-160; id., “Quelques aspects sociaux”, 30.

²⁶¹ DELSEMME, *Contribution*, 161-163.

²⁶² It is difficult to establish which and how many young men received this favour. Judging from the lists of diplomats abroad published in the AR and of the lists of non-active diplomats in the ADCB, which even put together can only give very random indications, there were five attachés in 1870 who would never take the diplomatic exam, three in 1875, and one in 1880, 1885, 1890 and 1894. Annual and more thorough checks from 1895 onwards, point to two attachés in 1895; one in 1896, 1897, 1898 and 1901; two in 1902; one in 1905, 1906, 1907 and 1910; and none in the other years. I have only taken into account those who received this title before 23 April 1911, that is four diplomatic exam sessions before the outbreak of the First World War. Of the attachés who received their title after 1 January 1895, but never got promoted, eleven out of twelve came from families ennobled before the nineteenth century. The other one was attached to the legation headed by his ennobled father, but died four years later.

²⁶³ AR, 1912, 29 and 134. Baron Albert d’Anethan was minister plenipotentiary and head of mission in Tokyo.

one unit.” Yet, Bassompierre continued, “do not foster any illusions [...], because the adjunction of this young worker is purely formal... This is the story: count de Kerchove de Denterghem, son of the former senator and governor [...], has just finished his law studies and wants to go in diplomacy. He is not in a hurry to shoulder the harness, though. Possessing great wealth, he first wants to see the world as a tourist [...] Nevertheless, he really wishes to have the title of *attaché de légation* now already. The case has quite discomfited Mr. Arendt. In the end, a negotiated solution has been found. Our young aspiring diplomat has started a couple of weeks of training at the Department and, since he travels via Japan, he is attached to your Legation. During the two or three months that he will stay in Nippon, Baron d’Anethan is requested to have him work a few times in the Chancellery. In this way, when someone asks count de Kerchove de Denterghem to which legation he is attached, he will be able to answer: ‘I am on my way to my posting in Tokyo’, or ‘I have just come from there’.”²⁶⁴

Bassompierre’s letter suggests that while requests such as that of Kerchove might have become rather scarce in comparison with their occurrence in the 1840s and 1850s, the idea nonetheless persisted that modalities for access to the diplomatic career could be debated. Successful outcomes seem to have depended largely on the social capital one could deploy in the negotiations. In this respect, Kerchove’s quality as the son of a former senator and provincial governor born in an old noble family, constituted a valuable asset. Yet tiny steps towards a more meritocratic and professional career had been taken, or at least some of the minds had been set in that direction. Focusing on the decades before the First World War, the following pages list these changes and study how aspiring diplomats dealt with them.

Bits of Paper

The Royal Decrees of 10 and 15 October 1841 had established the diplomatic exam as a prerequisite for obtaining the rank of second secretary. Before a jury composed of Foreign Ministry officials, jurists, and parliamentarians, aspiring diplomats first had to prove their acquaintance with Belgian and international history, with foreign languages (German or English, but also Latin), and with diplomatic writing styles. They were also tested as to their knowledge of international, public, and civil law. Finally, they had to convince the jury that they possessed notions of political economy, and of Belgium’s and other European countries commercial systems. If judged satisfactory, their performance earned them a certificate of

²⁶⁴ AMBZ, PF 1529, “André de Kerchove de Denterghem”, Albert de Bassompierre to Henri de Woelmont, 18 September 1908.

competency. From then on, it was up to the King and the Foreign Minister to decide whether or not to name them *secrétaire de légation de deuxième classe*.²⁶⁵

Only half a century later, these requirements underwent some changes. First, a second, commercial exam was established in 1888. This comprised, and allegedly extended, the economic subject matters of the diplomatic exam. Only those who had passed the latter examination more than a year before were allowed to put their knowledge of Belgium's international business relations and of its national systems of finances and economics, to the test. Success made them liable for promotion to the rank of first secretary. Later, following the Royal Decree of 12 November 1897, the diplomatic exam commission shifted its focus slightly from history to contemporary European and colonial politics, and from theoretical to practical issues of international law. Candidates also had to exhibit excellent proficiency in one foreign language and possess notions of another one. They could choose between English, German, and Spanish.²⁶⁶

After 1858, aspiring diplomats could only take part in the diplomatic exam if they presented a bachelor's degree in Letters and Philosophy, which comprised two successfully completed years of university study.²⁶⁷ Nine years later, Baron Jean Baptiste Nothomb, one of two liberal revolutionaries still active in the Belgian foreign service, wished to have his son, a civil engineer, attached to his legation. King Leopold II readily granted this favour to the man his father had ennobled fourteen years earlier. Before parliament, the Foreign Minister could easily justify this modification by pointing out that the diplomats' task was not exclusively political, but entailed economic aspects as well. As such, agents who were "familiar with the richness of our soil and the perfection of our products" would constitute an added value to the Belgian diplomatic corps.²⁶⁸ The Royal Decree of 30 July 1867 also listed military officers among the list of eligible candidates for the Career. This was probably a suggestion of the King himself, who might have wanted to institutionalise a practice that his father had so often recurred to.²⁶⁹ Nevertheless, no military officers and a mere two civil engineers would enter the career before the First World War. The dominant opinion in the Foreign Ministry indeed remained that the ideal Belgian diplomat was schooled in eloquence and proficient in several languages, rather than skilled in technical and economic matters. Since Letters and Philosophy were the branches of study most favoured by sons of the nobility, the government

²⁶⁵ *Pasinomie*, 1841, n° 1373-1375, 858-859.

²⁶⁶ *Pasinomie*, 1889, n° 133, 110; and ADCB, 1901, 200-201.

²⁶⁷ *Pasinomie*, 1858, n° 509, 308.

²⁶⁸ ROOSENS, "Agents diplomatiques", 117.

²⁶⁹ *Pasinomie*, 1867, n° 266, 256. During the reign of Leopold I, fifteen army officers transferred to the foreign service. See DELSEMME, "Quelques aspects sociaux", 31-33.

clearly had an ideal type of candidate in mind.²⁷⁰ In 1884, the diplomatic examinations committee confirmed that only diplomats drawn from the upper classes, would be able to adapt to the social and political environments in which they had to work.²⁷¹

Again, it took several decades before the admission criteria were changed. In addition to shifting the focus of the diplomatic exam to contemporary issues, the Royal Decree of 12 November 1897 stipulated that the bachelor's degree in Letters and Philosophy no longer sufficed to take part in the exam. Henceforth, access to the diplomatic career was open only to holders of a doctoral degree in law, obtained after five years of university study, or a master's degree in political and administrative sciences, granted upon successfully completing four years at the university. Three years later, a slight revision of the decree specified that having a bachelor's degree in Letters and Philosophy was, however, still necessary. Age requirements, fixed at twenty-one in 1857, were adapted accordingly and settled at twenty-three. Finally, the informal requirement that aspiring diplomats completed a training at the Department, the length of which would be determined by the Foreign Minister, was formalized.²⁷²

The Royal Decree of November 1897 removed the discrepancy between on the one hand a diplomatic exam that focused both on law and contemporary politics, and on history and languages; and on the other hand a policy that required university degrees merely certifying the latter competences. However, the knowledge of the Belgian and international economy, tested via the commercial exam, still found no matching degree in the admission criteria. Before the First World War, only two men who possessed such a degree but lacked the required ones, managed to embark upon a diplomatic career. Albeit not without any resistance.

The aforementioned Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle, holder of a master's degree in commercial sciences, initially met with a rebuff when he tried to convince the Foreign Minister that he had not only inherited a substantial sum of money, but had also acquired considerable diplomatic experience, heading legations ad interim within and outside of Europe for a total of more than two years. To convince the Political Director, the Foreign Minister, and finally the King to grant him exemption from providing the necessary university degrees, it took interventions from the Commercial Director, who pointed out that the Belgian business world demanded diplomats with economic expertise and from an official at the Political Direction, who testified that Lemaire had done a great job temporarily leading

²⁷⁰ WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 82-83.

²⁷¹ ROOSENS, "Agents diplomatiques", 109.

²⁷² ADCB, 200-201 and 209; ROOSENS, "L'accès", 147.

legations and had a perfect command of English.²⁷³ Lemaire's colleague Pol Le Tellier, who held the same degree, followed in his footsteps a few months later. In spite of having served in the consular corps for almost eight years, Le Tellier was likewise thoroughly scrutinized as to his morality and his presentability. Before he was released from presenting the required degrees, he also had to prove that he could financially support a career in diplomacy.²⁷⁴

The admissions of Lemaire and Le Tellier gave rise to a lengthy debate between the Commercial and Political Directions about whether or not to accept holders of a master's degree in commercial sciences to the diplomatic exam.²⁷⁵ More than four years later, those in favour seem to have won the battle. The Royal Decree of 25 May 1914 stipulated that doctors in law, doctors and masters in political, social, economic and administrative sciences, as well as engineers who had completed four-years of study and a number of military officers, were eligible to present themselves at the diplomatic exam.²⁷⁶

After the establishment of the diplomatic exam in 1842, the requirement of a bachelor's degree in Letters and Philosophy for gaining access to that exam in 1858, the adding of the civil engineer diploma in 1867, the introduction of the Commercial Exam in 1888, and the upgrading of diploma conditions in 1897 and 1900, the Royal Decree of May 1914 constituted a sixth – albeit comparatively tiny – step towards the democratization and the professionalization of the diplomatic career. University degrees were open to anyone, that is anyone who could spare the time and money necessary to pass the exams. Whereas those qualified still constituted a very limited group, these measures at least theoretically narrowed down the weight of great wealth and aristocratic titles in providing access to the diplomatic career.

However, the provisions of the Royal Decree of 25 May 1914 regarding university degree requirements only materialized from 1921 onwards. In the six weeks between its official publication and the outbreak of war in August of the same year, no aspiring diplomats entered the diplomatic career. More importantly, the needs of the foreign service during the war led the Foreign Ministry to employ many diplomats who did not meet the entry requirements, and the situations of many among them were regularized after the war.²⁷⁷ In the

²⁷³ AMBZ, PF, "Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle", Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle to Julien Davignon, 12 November 1909; Note of the Cabinet, 16 November 1909; Note of Direction B, 17 November 1909; Note of Direction P, 23 November 1909.

²⁷⁴ AMBZ, PF 2282, "Pol Le Tellier", Note of Direction P, 24 August 1910; Julien Davignon to Albert of Belgium, 3 December 1910; Julien Davignon to Pol Le Tellier, 16 December 1910.

²⁷⁵ For parts of this discussion, see AMBZ, PF, "Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle", Note of Direction B, 17 and 18 November 1909; Notes of Direction P, 29 November and 3 December 1909.

²⁷⁶ *Pasinomie*, 1914, n° 208, 331.

²⁷⁷ *Pasinomie*, 1920, n° 426, 260-270.

decades before the First World War, the stipulations that, from late 1897 onwards, rendered university degree requirements more rigid, institutionalized a period of training for attachés, and raised the minimum age, thus remained the most significant steps towards a more meritocratic – and ultimately more democratic – diplomatic career.

The Strength of Strong Ties

Apart from delaying career advancement for two years (due to the raising of the minimum age) and a few months (due to the formal introduction of a training period), the new entry conditions did cause that much change. Yet there were some aspiring diplomats, or rather father of aspiring diplomats, who failed to appreciate the new regulations.

Among them Count Gontran de Lichtervelde, the Belgian head of mission in Washington, who used his status to circumvent them. In September 1897, he asked Arendt if his son, twenty-year old Baudouin, could be named attaché in spite of his young age. Arendt, ever averse to such favours, neglected to submit the demand to his superior, whereupon Lichtervelde directly appealed to the then newly appointed Foreign Minister de Favereau, who made no difficulties and even urged Arendt to draw up a royal decree to name Baudouin de Lichtervelde legation attaché. However, the Political Director persisted, arguing that “the best advice to give to Mr de Lichtervelde junior is to continue his studies. In two years, he will have his master’s degree in political sciences.” Arendt then reproached Lichtervelde senior “with caring for nothing else than having his son enter the diplomatic corps as soon as possible.” He also indicated to the Foreign Minister that “such admission goes against the new principles” and warned him that this “favour will give rise to other requests. Will they also be granted? And where does it end?”²⁷⁸ Arendt decided not to budge for another three months, leading an increasingly despairing young Lichtervelde to ask him whether “it enters in your intentions to name me *attaché de légation* before or after the court ball.” It is unclear whether Arendt turned lenient, or if it took an intervention by the powers that be, but Lichtervelde obtained his nomination less than two weeks later.²⁷⁹

The new legislation that regulated entry requirements into the diplomatic career along more meritocratic lines, clearly found some convinced supporters within the Ministry. Arendt

²⁷⁸ AMBZ, PF 1531, “Baudouin de Lichtervelde”, Gontran de Lichtervelde to Léon Arendt, 4 September 1897; Gontran de Lichtervelde to Paul de Favereau, 6 October 1897; Note of Direction P, 18 October 1897; Paul de Favereau to Léon Arendt, 22 October 1897; Note of Direction P, 22 October 1897; Paul de Favereau to Gontran de Lichtervelde, 27 October 1897.

²⁷⁹ AMBZ, PF 1531, “Baudouin de Lichtervelde”, Baudouin de Lichtervelde to Léon Arendt, 18 January 1898. Lichtervelde was named legation attaché on 30 January 1898, see ADCB, 1901, 115, and 1936-1937, 263.

in particular set himself up as the guardian of the Career's professional dignity. A few months before his discussions about the appointment of young Lichtervelde, he had already needed to correct the Foreign Minister's disposition towards the appointment of prince Albert de Ligne as legation attaché in Vienna. In late 1896, Arendt had reluctantly assented to the request of Albert's father Edouard, who asked that his son be named attaché before the Ligne family's annual New Year's audience with the King, which would take place only two weeks after Albert had asked for his nomination. Almost three months later, the young prince presented himself at the Foreign Ministry with the message that he wanted to commence his training immediately. Arendt could not but applaud such diligence. However, when the Foreign Minister asked him whether it would be possible to name Ligne in Vienna after only five weeks of training, Arendt gave a negative advice, arguing that such was "not a serious training... it does not even appear to me as sufficient to properly learn how to read and send letters." Nevertheless, after the motivation behind the young diplomat's diligence had dawned on him, Arendt suggested a middle way: "I had heard that prince Edouard de Ligne deeply wished that his son could accompany him to a family event in Vienna. The latter may take up leave for family reasons, and finish his training later."²⁸⁰

The requests in late 1902 of Count Théodore d'Oultremont to grant his son Philippe access to the diplomatic exam, sat much less well with Arendt. It was one thing that young d'Oultremont could not produce the required university degrees, Arendt argued, but another that he did not seem to manage to pass his exams in due time: "M. d'Oultremont has been a bachelor in Letters and Philosophy for several years. If he does not yet have his master's degree ..., that is because he has failed several times, for reasons unknown to me; lack of effort or lack of competence." Arendt rarely passed such a harsh judgement. His reaction might have sprung from his frustration upon realizing that, although he might have felt that the aspiring diplomat in question was not suited for the Career, it would be impossible to impede the entry into the diplomatic corps of a person with such strong ties to the royal palace and the Foreign Ministry. So instead of opposing his nomination as legation attaché, Arendt tried to convince Favereau not to let d'Oultremont take part in the next session of the diplomatic exam, because "having to devote part of this year to studying for his master's, he will not have enough time left to do the required training and adequately prepare for the

²⁸⁰ AMBZ, PF 1415, "Albert de Ligne", Albert de Ligne to Paul de Favereau, 15 December 1896; Note of the Cabinet of Foreign Minister, 21 December 1896; Note of Direction P, 19 March 1897; Note of the Cabinet of the Foreign Minister, s.d. [early April 1897]; Note of Direction P, 10 April 1897; Note of the Cabinet of the Foreign Minister, 10 April 1897; Paul de Favereau to Albert de Ligne, 15 April 1897.

diplomatic exam.”²⁸¹ Although Favereau initially agreed with his Political Director, d’Oultremont was eventually allowed to take part in the next diplomatic exam, even without having obtained his master’s degree. He would, however, only pass the diplomatic exam two years later.²⁸²

The court dignitary Count Théodore d’Oultremont, the large landowner Prince Edouard de Ligne, and the senior diplomat Count Gontran de Lichtervelde all seem to have regarded the new legislation as obstructing their sons’ career paths, and exerted their prestige to remove these obstacles. The discussions that accompanied the entry into the diplomatic corps of count Charles de Romrée de Vichenet, further illustrate the dispositions of aspiring diplomats and their families towards an admittance policy that tended to give more weight to merit, and less to fortune and high birth. In the summer of 1906, a few weeks before his twenty-second birthday and well before he had obtained the necessary university degrees, Romrée wished to be appointed legation attaché and sent to the Belgian mission in Madrid. Although Van der Elst had pleaded Romrée’s case with Arendt, the latter objected, arguing that this would constitute a reversion to censurable policies: “Similar arrangements were tolerated in the past. They presented inconveniences that experience has revealed. In reality, it meant giving the title of *attaché de Légation* to university students, which is a striking abuse. Late Mr. L.[ambermont] was extremely disposed towards granting such favours.”²⁸³

In the eyes of Arendt, the death of the secretary-general constituted the dawn of a new era: “Ever since, we have plainly separated university studies from preparations for the diplomatic exam, and only admitted young people in the diplomatic corps if their university studies were completed and certified by a diploma. To let them enter the diplomatic corps along the way, would be a manner of proceeding contrary to the dignity of the Career.”²⁸⁴ The conviction with which Arendt saw to the observance of the new regulations suggests that he ranked among its principal instigators, and that demands for the professionalization of the diplomatic career thus came at least partly from within the Foreign Ministry itself. To further eliminate any dilettantism from the diplomatic career, Arendt had already proposed in December 1905 to introduce as a “necessary admission requirement” that attachés went to

²⁸¹ AMBZ, PF 254, “Philippe d’Oultremont”, Note of Direction P, 31 December 1902; Philippe d’Oultremont to Paul de Favereau, 18 March 1903; Paul de Favereau to Philippe d’Oultremont, 24 March 1903; Paul de Favereau to Leopold II de Belgique, 11 April 1903.

²⁸² AMBZ, PF 254, “Philippe d’Oultremont”, Philippe d’Oultremont to Paul de Favereau, 11 June 1903; Paul de Favereau to Philippe d’Oultremont, 18 June 1903; Note of Direction P, s.d.[n° 5035].

²⁸³ AMBZ, PF 1559, “Charles de Romrée de Vichenet”, Note of Direction P, 6 August 1906.

²⁸⁴ AMBZ, PF 1559, “Charles de Romrée de Vichenet”, Note of Direction P, 6 August 1906.

where they were sent. Many attachés, he complained, “make difficulties to go to postings [that] do not please them.”²⁸⁵

However, there existed forces outside of the department that every official needed to reckon with. Romrée, or more likely his maternal grandfather, decided to appeal to them. Not long after Arendt’s refusal to return to practices of times past, Foreign Minister de Favereau, still holding the office allotted to him more than ten years earlier, received a letter from King Leopold II’s secretary. It read: “The King has ordered me to draw the situation of young count the Romrée, grandson to the Marquis de Beaufort, to your most kind attention. The latter very deeply wishes that his grandson could be named honorary legation attaché before his coming marriage. He will be doctor in law next year. Until then, would it not be possible to name him attaché? ... The King would be happy if satisfaction could be given to the Marquis de Beaufort who is ever very devoted [to him]. Not having the time anymore to acquit myself verbally from my message, forgive me for doing so through this note.”²⁸⁶

Favereau immediately consulted with Arendt about whether or not to comply with this request. Following the advice of the Political Director, who continued to resist sending idle attachés without the required degrees to Belgian legations, the Foreign Minister responded both to the King’s secretary and to the Marquis de Beaufort that the title of legation attaché could only be conferred if Romrée would actually do some work at a Belgian legation, which meant that he would not have the time to study for and thus pass his final law exams. “On behalf of the true interests of this young man”, Favereau continued, “I have come to refuse him the nomination he requested.”²⁸⁷ Beaufort, however, could not accept this point of view. He argued that the title of attaché was truly necessary “because the family in which my grandson is to be married, has stated this career as an absolute precondition”, and expressed his regret that “the exams have become the cause of an absolute impediment.”²⁸⁸ Upon reading Beaufort’s letter, Arendt acted surprised, and suggested to the Foreign Minister that there might have been a little misunderstanding as to the necessity of university degrees, for they did not constitute an impediment. Quite the contrary, they were “the inevitable condition [...] for entering the career.”²⁸⁹ The Foreign Minister continued to back his Political Director, even after a personal visit by the Marquis de Beaufort, and a more moderate request by

²⁸⁵ AMBZ, 12.978, “Réorganisation des services extérieurs”, Note of Direction P, 9 December 1905.

²⁸⁶ AMBZ, PF 1559, “Charles de Romrée de Vichenet”, Edmond Carton de Wiart to Paul de Favereau, s.d. [late August 1906]

²⁸⁷ AMBZ, PF 1559, “Charles de Romrée de Vichenet”, Note of Direction P, 30 August 1906; Paul de Favereau to Edmond Carton de Wiart, 30 August 1906; Paul de Favereau to Albert de Beaufort, 4 September 1906.

²⁸⁸ AMBZ, PF 1559, “Charles de Romrée de Vichenet”, Albert de Beaufort to Paul de Favereau, 13 September 1906.

²⁸⁹ AMBZ, PF 1559, “Charles de Romrée de Vichenet”, Note of Direction P, 20 September 1906.

Romrée to obtain the less prestigious title of *attaché (libre)* instead of *attaché de légation*.²⁹⁰ Yet, more than a month after Beaufort's visit, but a few days before Romrée was to be married, Favereau send the draft of a royal decree to the King for him to sign. It named Charles de Romrée *attaché de légation*.²⁹¹ Most likely, the King's secretary had in the meantime found an opening in his agenda to acquit himself verbally of explaining to the Foreign Minister the nature of the King's disposition towards his friend Beaufort.

The negotiations that accompanied the entries into the diplomatic corps of Count Charles de Romrée de Vichenet, Prince Albert de Ligne, Count Philippe d'Oultremont, and Count Baudouin de Lichtervelde indicate how much young noblemen (and their fathers and grandfathers) prized the cultural capital institutionalized in a diplomatic title, even one of the lowest rank. Unlike Kerchove, who especially appreciated its quality as a first-class travel ticket, they used their appointment as *legation attaché* to conclude a favourable marriage, or to confirm their prestige in their interactions with other members of Belgian high society. Moreover, Ligne, Beaufort, Oultremont, and Lichtervelde ranked among the very oldest of the kingdom's high aristocratic families, while Romrée was a younger lineage but that had also belonged to the nobility before the mid-sixteenth century. Their exclusive social circles, which tightened even more through intermarriage, to a considerable extent overlapped with those of the Belgian King and his family. As such, a title that attested to a willingness to spend their time and parts of their fortunes to serve the dynasty, added to the social and cultural capital that they already embodied by simply 'being' a prince de Ligne, or a count de Lichtervelde, de Romrée, or d'Oultremont.

Yet other examples could serve to illustrate that of sixty-nine diplomats who entered the Career from mid-1884 onwards and stayed at least until early 1911, nearly all the families that tried to negotiate the entry of their scions into the diplomatic corps belonged to the highest aristocracy.²⁹² Their social backgrounds seem to have convinced them that they not only possessed sufficient amounts of capital to embark upon a diplomatic career, but a surplus, derived from their aristocratic status, that would significantly add to the overall capital of the Belgian diplomatic corps. The investment of this surplus, they seem to have believed, justified their claims for being exempted from putting in the same amounts of

²⁹⁰ AMBZ, PF 1559, "Charles de Romrée de Vichenet", Paul de Favereau to Albert de Beaufort, 21 September 1906; Note of the Cabinet, 3 October 1906; Charles de Romrée de Vichenet to Paul de Favereau, 13 October 1906

²⁹¹ AMBZ, PF 1559, "Charles de Romrée de Vichenet", Paul de Favereau to Léopold II de Belgique, 6 November 1906.

²⁹² See the cases of Count Humbert Mouchet Battefort de Laubespain (AMBZ, PF 1406, documents from 29 December 1899 until 10 February 1900), and of Count Charles de Liedekerke (AMBZ, PF 193, documents from 24 December 1902 until 8 November 1904).

institutionalised cultural capital, such as through the presentation of higher university degrees. They might also have felt that it justified their demands for entering the career at an earlier age or for choosing themselves to the prestige of which Belgian legation they would add. Perhaps this was also a way of distinguishing themselves from those of their future colleagues who, in their eyes, did not possess the same amounts of embodied cultural capital than they did. In the last decades before the First World War, the international world of diplomacy continued to value highly aristocratic titles. Added to the generally more elevated amount of social capital that holders of these titles possessed, this certainly contributed to the successful outcomes of the negotiations over access to the Belgian diplomatic corps in which aspiring diplomats of such backgrounds engaged.

Of the seventy-nine diplomats in active service during the spring of 1911, more than a fifth could trace their aristocratic descent back to the Middle Ages. Among the remaining majority of aspiring diplomats, it seems that only one had a family member who felt in a position to negotiate the entry of his kin. Head of mission in The Hague, Paul Guillaume solicited his son Gustave's swift nomination as *attaché de légation* and subsequent adjunction to The Hague. Although Arendt replied that young Guillaume should go "where the service requires it", both requests were granted within two weeks.²⁹³ It is unclear why Paul Guillaume obtained these favours for his son, which included virtual exemption from training at the Department. It is unlikely that the service really required it. Adding another diplomat would indeed make The Hague the most populated of all Belgian legations in a time when Belgian foreign policy directed most of its attention to the mounting tensions between its big southern and eastern neighbours.²⁹⁴ The lack of sources to explain this departure from fairly new practices could, however, also point to the power that, as the case of Romrée's nomination to attaché revealed, preferred not to operate through written documents. Paul Guillaume was indeed very close to Leopold II. In the early 1870s, his father Gustave had been Minister of War, an office that traditionally went to royal confidants, and until his death in 1877, also aide-de-camp to the King. During his years in the Royal Palace, Gustave senior actively contributed to Leopold II's plans for overseas expansion. In 1873, his services earned him nobility and a baron's title for himself and all his descendants.²⁹⁵ It might also explain why, in 1870, his son Paul entered the diplomatic career most favourably, at the age of eighteen and

²⁹³ AMBZ, PF 1524, "Gustave Guillaume", Paul Guillaume to Léon Arendt, 11 October 1905; Léon Arendt to Paul Guillaume, 17 October 1905.

²⁹⁴ AR, 1905, 29-33. For an elaborate study of the effect of these tensions on Belgian society and on the country's policy, see BITSCH, Marie-Thérèse, *La Belgique entre la France et l'Allemagne 1905-1914*, Paris, 1994.

²⁹⁵ DUCHESNE, A., "Henri-Louis-Gustave baron Guillaume", *BN*, 38, Brussels, 1973, 289-299 (especially 293).

without any university degree. Paul would spend the first ten years of his career at the Department, where he was closely involved in the King's colonial projects.²⁹⁶ The King might not have made too many difficulties granting to Gustave junior a favour much smaller than the one his father received thirty-five years earlier.

The request of Paul Guillaume was indeed far less demanding than the ones uttered by the fathers of the high aristocratic diplomats of his son's generation. Overall, the way that aspiring diplomats of bourgeois or more recent noble extraction presented themselves to the Foreign Minister, differed greatly from the attitude that the high nobility assumed. Instead of limiting themselves to fifty-word letters stating their desire to enter the diplomatic corps, the former generally went at greater length to prove their worthiness of a career in diplomacy.²⁹⁷ Pierre Orts, who entered the career in 1898, wrote an elaborate letter arguing how his studies, his previous work experience and his personal interests made him qualified to embark upon a career that he particularly valued. He also proclaimed to commit himself, "from this moment on, to go wherever it pleases His Majesty's Government to employ my services."²⁹⁸ Arendt, of course, was extremely sensitive to the expression of such commitments. He did all he could to present Orts to the King in the most favourable light, and to speed up the aspiring diplomat's admission into the diplomatic corps. His nomination to attaché de légation took place less than two weeks after his request.²⁹⁹ In his memoirs, written between the late 1930s and the early 1950s, Orts presented his entry in diplomacy rather differently. Because he was a scion of a bourgeois family with strong affiliations to the Liberal Party, Orts wrote, he had to abandon his dreams of a career in magistracy. In the three decades that followed the Catholic Party's election victory in 1884, he argued, "the most bigoted and intolerant regime that our country has known" impeded "access to no matter which public function" for anyone who "had the reputation of not sharing the opinions of the men in power." Diplomacy, however, would have been the exception, for "in those days, the King had a say in the choice of our diplomats and the King has nothing to do with factionary scheming." It was "by the intervention of the King", Orts claimed, "that I was named attaché de légation."³⁰⁰ Orts'

²⁹⁶ ADCB, 1910, 153; VANDERSMISSEN, *Koningen*, 362 and 437-437; GUILLAUME, Paul, "Souvenirs intimes. Comment le Roi Léopold est intervenu au Congo", *L'Indépendance belge*, 2 March 1918.

²⁹⁷ For examples of such letters written by high aristocrats, see AMBZ, PF 1529, "André de Kerchove de Denterghem", André de Kerchove de Denterghem to Julien Davignon, 29 July 1908 (38 words); PF 1415, "Albert de Ligne", Albert de Ligne to Paul de Favereau, 15 December 1896 (56 words); PF 254, "Philippe d'Oultremont", Philippe d'Oultremont to Paul de Favereau, 18 March 1903 (42 words).

²⁹⁸ AMBZ, PF 1535, "Pierre Orts", Pierre Orts to Paul de Favereau, 21 November 1898.

²⁹⁹ AMBZ, PF 1535, "Pierre Orts", Note of Direction P, 24 November 1898; Paul de Favereau to Leopold II de Belgique, 29 November 1898; ADCB, 1901, 120.

³⁰⁰ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 1-2.

discourse might contain some elements of truth, but not only the King stood above party politics. Although a convinced Catholic, the Political Director of the Department definitively did, too.

Surely, the 1911 Belgian diplomatic corps also counted among its ranks men who, at the beginning of their careers, possessed almost none or at least relatively weak ties to leading foreign policy executives. This especially applied to some members of the lower nobility and to some roturiers. While the former seem to have easily found aristocrats with some political weight to plead their case, the entry procedure of the latter generally advanced with more difficulties.³⁰¹ In 1909, the claim of the brewer's son Guy Heyndrickx that he possessed considerable wealth and that his mother belonged to the Dutch nobility, was not taken at face-value. Neither did a recommendation letter from a Dutch baron suffice. These were the cases when the Foreign Minister would recur to the provincial governors, which generally slowed down the appointment procedure. Heyndrickx eventually became a legation attaché, but only four months after he had submitted his request. However, Arendt made sure that his nomination was antedated three and a half months.³⁰² In this way, the disadvantages for his career development were limited.

Before Arendt became Political Director, such compensations seem not to have been granted. As a consequence, Emmanuel Havenith saw his entry into the diplomatic corps delayed by three months. Apparently, his letter of recommendation by the Catholic parliamentarian Victor Fris did not suffice, for the Foreign Minister contacted the provincial governor for a second opinion. The latter judged Havenith unsuitable for diplomacy: "From a social perspective, this family occupied a rather high position in the Antwerp business world, but after the father's death, his sons have not been able to hold their position. The three eldest ones have dissipated their fortunes and if my sources are correct, Mr Emmanuel Havenith, too [...] It would be regrettable to have in diplomacy a young man who has dissipated his fortune and whose family has lost its rank because of the conduct of its members."³⁰³ Not liking what he had read, the Foreign Minister let Havenith know that he had "not the slightest intention to

³⁰¹ For examples of the former, see AMBZ, PF 1525, "Joseph Herry", Herman della Faille d'Huyse to Julien Davignon, 27 June 1914; and AMBZ, PF 1812, "Ernest Kervyn de Meerendré", Raymond de Kerchove d'Exaerde to Julien Davignon, 17 October 1912.

³⁰² AMBZ, PF 1526, "Guy Heyndrickx", Note of the Secretary General, 23 July 1909; Note of Direction P, 26 July 1909; Note of Direction B, 3 August 1909, Julien Davignon to Governor of Brabant, 11 August 1909; Governor of Brabant to Julien Davignon, 25 August 1908; De Ruelle to Léon Arendt, 26 October 1909; Note of Direction P, 30 October 1909.

³⁰³ AMBZ, PF 147, "Emmanuel Havenith", Joseph Riquet de Caraman Chimay to Governor of Antwerp, 6 November 1890; Governor of Antwerp to Joseph Riquet de Caraman Chimay, 14 November 1890.

submit your nomination to the rank of *attaché de Légation* to the King.”³⁰⁴ Havenith eventually became a legation attaché, but it took another intervention by Fris, who continued to support Havenith’s request “in the most vigorous of terms”, and a few more letters between the Foreign Minister and the provincial governor before the misunderstanding – Emmanuel was the one son who had not squandered his wealth – was cleared out.³⁰⁵

The largely premodern structure of power over the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island seems to have incited many high aristocrats, aware that their presence in the resort in a way consolidated this power structure, to claim certain privileges concerning the access of their sons to the island. Yet to a certain extent, they had to reckon with the Political Director. Arendt indeed seems to have functioned as a kind of lockkeeper in the harbour of the Belgian resort, trying – with varying success to introduce and uphold a meritocratic access policy. As the next section will reveal, he combined this task with that of traffic controller on the Diplomatic Island’s roads which led to and from the Belgian resort.

§ 3. The Road to Glory

If he was to take the diplomatic exam, Kerchove told his wife, their career paths would go more smoothly than she might have thought: “We do not, I believe, have to fear postings too far away from Brussels, first because I will raise the spectre of leaving [the diplomatic career], and also due to our situation as married man. Only our first posting as minister will fatally be a hole, as well as one of our posts as secretary [...] I will become minister at the age of 43.”

Kerchove clearly saw his joining the diplomatic corps as a gift to Belgian diplomacy. His view of a possible future in the diplomatic corps does, however, also raise a number of questions. The best roads on Diplomatic Island were sometimes crowded places, where many, unequally equipped travellers competed for prestige. The further one got, the greater the glory one obtained. But what were the rules of this race? Many rewards lay along the way, and if diplomats took the right turns and made the right stops, they could swiftly upgrade their means of transportation. Certainly, the roads were not travelled in complete isolation, and a diplomat sometimes encountered family members, made friends, or even met a partner who was prepared to travel with him. How could these people facilitate the journey? The road also

³⁰⁴ AMBZ, PF 147, “Emmanuel Havenith”, Joseph Riquet de Caraman Chimay to Emmanuel Havenith, 19 November 1890.

³⁰⁵ AMBZ, PF 147, “Emmanuel Havenith”, Prince Joseph Riquet de Caraman Chimay to Governor of Antwerp, 8 December 1890; Governor of Antwerp to Prince Joseph Riquet de Caraman Chimay, 11 December 1890; Prince Joseph Riquet de Caraman Chimay to Governor of Antwerp, 15 December 1890.

contained some potholes. What did they look like, could they be avoided, and would this take much extra time? Since old age and illness could abruptly end the journey, time was indeed limited. Furthermore, not all travellers could plant their flag where they had hoped, so it was important to get there first. There was, however, no lack of consolation prizes.

The Rules of the Race

Ever since the Royal Decree of 15 October 1842 had institutionalized the Belgian diplomatic career, second class secretaries were required to serve for at least three years before they could be promoted. However, it seems that informal rules came to regulate the promotions of junior diplomats only when Arendt took over the Political Direction in the late 1890s.

In 1900, evaluating the previous twenty years of appointments to first-class secretary, Arendt calculated that more than four out of every five were promoted with an additional delay of between three and four months. Only two, Baron Beyens and Count Charles de Lalaing, became first secretary immediately after three years of service. They owed their quick advancements to “the value of their exam and to the services they had rendered.”³⁰⁶ Beyens was one of only a handful of diplomats who, throughout the whole late nineteenth century, passed the diplomatic exam with great distinction, while Lalaing, having completed the exam with distinction, spent half of his term as second secretary successfully leading the legation in Bucharest in very difficult circumstances, following the recall of the head of mission, who had been declared *persona non grata* by the Rumanian King.³⁰⁷ From late 1904 onwards, the results obtained in the diplomatic exam became less decisive, while degrees awarded at the commercial exam gained importance. The diplomatic exam henceforth only determined promotions from attaché to second secretary, great distinction meaning appointment within a month, distinction within six months, while honourable mention and satisfaction led to nomination within a year. Following a proposal from Capelle, Arendt wished to introduce the same delays – in addition to the minimum period of three years as second secretary – for those who had passed the commercial exam. Favereau, however, chose to halve these delays, despite Arendt’s plain objections that “this would really be an insufficient sanction, and one that had too little impact on the order of precedence according

³⁰⁶ AMBZ, 13.163 “Questions divers”, Nominations et promotion. Règles, délais, ..., Note of Direction P, [late July] 1900.

³⁰⁷ ADCB, 1910, 139 and 155; LUBELSKI-BERNARD, *Leopold II*, 37-38.

to merit as is customary these days.”³⁰⁸ However, it would take another five and a half years before exam results actually brought about any changes in the order of seniority amongst second secretaries.³⁰⁹

The twenty years of nominations to second secretary that Arendt overviewed in 1900 also told him that three diplomats who had completed the exam with distinction, obtained their promotions after three years and one month. By contrast, another diplomat, who had obtained great distinction, had to wait four months longer. The difference was that the latter one had never left Brussels, whereas the former three had been sent relatively far away, to Cairo and to Bucharest. In addition to results obtained at the exams and merits on the job, this was an equally important criterion for advancement. For subsequent promotions, to advisor and to minister, serving the country abroad carried even more weight. Arendt noted that especially overseas postings granted “a certain right to a faster promotion”, for few junior diplomats were keen to accept them.³¹⁰ Between 1900 and 1911, the number of junior diplomats in far-away postings was more than doubled, resulting in nine junior diplomats serving in the Belgian legations in Washington, Beijing, Tokyo, Mexico-City, Rio, and Teheran.³¹¹ The principle of more favourably treating diplomats who were willing to cross the oceans had prevailed for several decades: the Political Direction had indeed long made “a great distinction between the agents who were only driven by their personal conveniences ..., and those who do not shy away from any sacrifice, who accept all the missions, even the ones

³⁰⁸ AMBZ, 13.163, “Questions divers”, Nominations et promotion. Règles, délais, ..., Note of Direction P, 20 December 1904.

³⁰⁹ AMBZ, 13.163, “Questions divers”, Nominations et promotion. Règles, délais, ..., Note of Direction P, 22 March 1910; ADCB, 1910, 164.

³¹⁰ ADCB, 1900, 95-128; AMBZ, 13.163 “Questions divers”, Nominations et promotion. Règles, délais, ..., Note of Direction P, [late July] 1900. Arendt’s reflections at least partially sprung from documents he had received from senior diplomat Paul Guillaume in 1899. Because directing the Belgian legation in Athens left him, as he claimed, with too much spare time, Guillaume had occupied himself with writing a project to reform the regulations of the diplomatic career concerning junior diplomats. Referring to the sixteen per cent increase in the budget for advisors and secretaries that parliament had voted earlier that year, Guillaume suggested to redistribute the financial means apportioned to junior diplomats in such a way that those prepared to cross the oceans received higher salaries. He added that more overseas postings should have secretaries, for replacing ministers on leave in those legations with diplomats coming from Europe was extremely expensive. See PHK, 24 February 1899, 689-690; AMBZ, Classement B, 72/2, “Corps diplomatique”, “Projet de règlement organique par le Baron Guillaume”, Paul Guillaume to Paul de Favereau, January 1898. Another proposition of Guillaume was to abolish the function of advisor in certain legations in European capitals where it could not be justified in terms of workload, nor in terms of the importance of Belgian interests. “Everyone knows”, Guillaume argued, that these functions were only created “to improve the situation of a few first secretaries at a time when the career had become really difficult.” His suggestion, as could be expected, did not materialize. Arendt would have been well aware that degrading the position of the second diplomat in a legation could have repercussions both on Belgian relations with the host country, which might have considered it an unfriendly act, and on competition between junior members of the Belgian diplomatic corps, which saw career advancement opportunities of its members reduced. While no nominal increase in the salaries of secretaries in overseas postings occurred, the Foreign Minister did act upon Guillaume’s suggestion to send more junior diplomats overseas.

³¹¹ AR, 1900, 25-29; and 1911, 30-34.

most far away, without hesitation and without making objections.” Officials at the Political Direction also knew that the latter diplomats did so “in the hope to benefit from the hesitations or the refusals of their more senior colleagues, and to manage thus to win a few places and jump over them in order to faster occupy a posting as Minister.”³¹²

In theory, junior diplomats could become minister after little more than eight years upon completing the diplomatic exam. In addition to the stipulated period of three years as second secretary, junior diplomats had to serve for at least five years as first secretary. Afterwards, and provided that they had passed the commercial exam, they could be named advisor. Since no minimum length of time was attached to this rank, advisors could theoretically obtain immediate promotions to minister resident, and even to minister plenipotentiary. In the 1850s and 1860s, such advancements had turned several capable young diplomats into heads of missions not long after their thirtieth birthday.³¹³ However, by the late 1880s, the diplomatic career required its members to pass at least several years in every stage. If we take into account promotions among diplomats in active service on 23 April 1911 (and until that date), the average time spent as second secretary amounted to three years and four months and as first secretary to seven years and four-and-a-half months, while advisors generally stayed in their ranks for six years. An average journey from the rank of second secretary to that of minister resident thus took almost seventeen years. The average time of the three fastest junior travellers in each rank was respectively three years and one month, five years and six weeks, and three years and eleven months.³¹⁴

Kerchove, who at the earliest could be named second secretary one month after his twenty-sixth birthday, wrote that he would be a minister at the age of forty-three. That he knew exactly how long an average journey from attaché to minister took, indicates how much diplomats were aware of the career paths of their predecessors and the extent to which precedents determined the time span diplomats had to spend in each of the different stages of the Career. Yet the question remains what spurred him not to count himself among the faster climbers of the diplomatic ladder. Could it have been modesty? Perhaps, but such an attitude would have contradicted the way he represented himself throughout the rest of the letter to his wife. The answer lies rather in the extent to which career pace and the so-called ‘diplomatic

³¹² AMBZ, 13.163, “Questions divers”, Nominations et promotion. Règles, délais, ..., Note of Direction P, 14 December 1891.

³¹³ ADCB, 1900, 191; AMBZ, 13.163, “Questions divers”, Nominations et promotion. Règles, délais, ..., Note of Direction P, 14 December 1891.

³¹⁴ ADCB, 1910, 137-171; and 1914, 131-174. Here, I have not taken into account Jules Greindl, who was promoted to minister-resident in 1867, after only sixteen months as advisor and twenty-three years before the diplomat who was second on the 1911 seniority list. The other diplomats obtained their promotions from 1890 onwards, when the stages of the career had become more clear-cut.

movement', that is the almost cyclical combination of promotions and changes of posting, could actually be influenced. Most diplomats seemed to believe it could. Following them as they travelled the road to glory will reveal how they mixed pro-active behaviour with deploying their social capital to reach their goals.

Facilitating the Journey

Of paramount importance to young diplomats was that they ingratiated themselves with their superiors. Partly because they had little evidence of young secretaries' performances in the field, the Foreign Minister and the Department's leading officials attached great value to the evaluations that heads of mission wrote to inform the Department of the diplomatic qualities of junior diplomats. The sense of solidarity and the close ties that existed between the members of the diplomatic corps meant that such notes very rarely contained negative comments.³¹⁵ The opinion of Jules Greindl, a head of mission from 1867 until his retirement in 1912, was held in particularly high esteem. More than a third of all diplomats active in the spring of 1911 had served under his command in the legations of Lisbon and Berlin. While Greindl never seems to have passed negative judgements, Arendt surely knew how to read eulogies written by the *eminence grise* of Belgian diplomacy. At Jules Le Jeune's departure from Berlin, Greindl ensured Arendt to retain only very good memories of the young diplomat: "Very intelligent, devoted to his work and highly educated, M. Le Jeune does not only possess the technical knowledge indispensable to any diplomat, but he also has a very extensive general culture. Pleasant of character and manners, in my opinion he has all the necessary qualities to succeed in the career that he has chosen."³¹⁶ Greindl's evaluation of count Philippe d'Oultremont contained the same conviction, but stressed other qualities, such as the "diligence with which he applies himself to learn the service" and his being "modest, in that he did not hide what he still lacked in order to do more important work".³¹⁷

While Le Jeune got his promotion to first secretary in less than three years and three months, d'Oultremont had to wait for more than three and a half years. This might not have bothered him too much given that his father successfully exerted his influence to have

³¹⁵ See for instance AMBZ, PF 4853, "Paul May", Albéric Fallon to Paul de Favereau, 10 October 1904; PF 62, "Emile de Cartier de Marchienne", Conrad de Buisseret to Léon Arendt, 1 October 1909; PF 1531, "Baudouin de Lichtervelde", Paul Guillaume to Julien Davignon, 29 October 1909; PF 1559, "Charles de Romrée de Vichenet", Werner van den Steen de Jehay to Julien Davignon, 30 March 1910.

³¹⁶ AMBZ, PF 4868, "Jules Le Jeune", Jules Greindl to Paul de Favereau, 21 October 1903.

³¹⁷ AMBZ, PF 254, "Philippe d'Oultremont", Jules Greindl to Paul de Favereau, 29 April 1907. See also PF 1415, "Albert de Ligne", Jules Greindl to Paul de Favereau, 18 January 1904; PF 1531, "Baudouin de Lichtervelde", Jules Greindl to Julien Davignon, 11 July 1908; PF 397, "Légation à Berlin", Jules Greindl to Julien Davignon, 24 March 1910.

Philippe sent wherever he wanted to go. This led him from Brussels to Berlin, and later on to Paris, “the posting he [Philippe] desires the most”.³¹⁸ Young d’Oultremont could stay in the French capital for almost four years, after which he was transferred to The Hague, and eventually back to Paris. All these legations were much sought after by junior diplomats. D’Oultremont was indeed one of few secretaries who never had to work in what Kerchove called a ‘hole’.

It seems that at the initial stages of the diplomatic career, junior diplomats could still benefit from the help of their parents. Count Humbert Mouchet Battefort de Laubespain, who really enjoyed himself at the Belgian legation in Vienna, told Arendt that “I resign myself to accepting my nomination in Morocco [...] only in the hope to return to Vienna.” Only such return, he continued, could “indemnify me for a stay in a posting as disagreeable and lost as Tangiers.”³¹⁹ Convinced that he was entitled to a quid pro quo, Mouchet started to plead for his return to Austria just months after his arrival in Morocco. To no avail, however. He then appealed to his parents to obtain a posting as secretary in Paris. Since Arendt had apparently told them that he always reckoned as much as possible with the wishes of young diplomats’ parents, they bombarded him with requests to have Mouchet transferred to the French capital. Instead of Paris, their son eventually got London, which was a compromise that the Mouchets were quite happy about.³²⁰ Also Gaston de Ramaix wished to be transferred to the British capital. Ramaix, too, got a little help from his father. Senator Maurice de Ramaix, a former diplomat, tried to convince Arendt that the Department also had a gain in the transfer of his son to London. In the post scriptum of a letter in which he pleaded Gaston’s wish, Maurice subtly noted that “my theses against the fusion and in favour of the diplomats did not go down well with certain members [of the Senate].”³²¹ In this way, senator de Ramaix, who had indeed opposed the fusion of the diplomatic and consular corpses the day before in the Senate, seized this intervention to obtain the much coveted position as first secretary in London for his son. Arguably with some success, for Ramaix junior was sent to London two months later. The fusion of the diplomatic and consular careers was a hot topic in contemporary parliamentary debates, and preventing that from happening was very dear to the Political Direction (and to the entire diplomatic corps), if only for the sake of the diplomatic career’s

³¹⁸ ROOSENS, “L’accès”, 145.

³¹⁹ AMBZ, PF 1406, “Humbert Mouchet Battefort de Laubespain”, Humbert Mouchet Battefort de Laubespain to Léon Arendt, 27 February 1907.

³²⁰ AMBZ, PF 1406, “Humbert Mouchet Battefort de Laubespain”, Humbert Mouchet Battefort de Laubespain to Léon Arendt, 27 January 1908; Théodule Mouchet Battefort de Laubespain to Léon Arendt, 17 June 1908; Note of Direction P, 26 June 1908.

³²¹ AMBZ, PF 1311, “Gaston de Ramaix”, Maurice de Ramaix to Léon Arendt, 25 June 1909.

professional dignity. However, since for Arendt protecting the career's dignity also meant safeguarding it from favouritism, senator de Ramaix's intervention most likely did not have an impact on the pace of young Gaston's career.

Parents who could pull some strings might indeed have been able to influence their sons' transfers between postings, but their impact on promotions in rank was extremely limited. Consequently, the frequency with which family members tried to shorten the time junior diplomats spent in each rank diminished as they climbed the hierarchical ladder. Yet Arendt must have sometimes felt deluged with letters from second secretaries' fathers and uncles when their sons and nephews had completed their third year of service. In 1898, Joseph Mélot's father Ernest, an MP and former Interior Minister, bitterly complained that after three years and one month, his son had still not been promoted to first secretary. Given "his brilliant exam, the excellent notes of his superiors, and the memory of the services that I have rendered", he argued, he at least expected that Joseph would not have to wait longer than usual. Mélot senior also told Arendt that he had no choice but to go straight to the Foreign Minister, and to exert all the influence he possessed in order to have justice done.³²² Slightly bending the truth, Arendt pointed out that the best secretaries only got promoted after three years and three months, but that he would do what he could to speed up young Mélot's advancement.³²³ However, the eventual impact of Ernest Mélot's demarche was rather limited, and Joseph obtained his promotion after three years and twelve weeks. Arendt indeed wished not to take into account the services of the former Interior Minister, and knew that while Mélot junior might have passed the commercial exam with great distinction, he had been much less successful at the diplomatic exam. In the late 1890s, only the latter had an impact on career advancement.

In the decades before the First World War, the Department would never rap any diplomat over the knuckles who, in an effort to gain promotion, appealed to influential family members or political friends. By contrast, interventions from foreign colleagues were far less appreciated. In February 1909, Raymond Leghait, advisor at the Belgian legation in Vienna, wished to obtain a promotion to minister-resident and was prepared to go to either Morocco or China, with a strong preference for the posting closer to Brussels. He involved his father, who was minister plenipotentiary in Paris and managed to convince the French Foreign Minister Stéphane Pichon to suggest to Van der Elst that Paris would be very satisfied in case of

³²² AMBZ, PF 218, "Joseph Mélot", Ernest Mélot to Léon Arendt, 27 April 1898. For a similar demarche, see AMBZ, PF 1425, "Maximilien van Ypersele de Strihou", Note of Direction P, 26 March 1907.

³²³ AMBZ, PF 218, "Joseph Mélot", Léon Arendt to Ernest Mélot, 7 June 1898.

Leghait's appointment in Tangiers. Van der Elst was not amused when he read Pichon's letter. Sharing the secretary-general's sentiments, Arendt informed the Foreign Minister that Leghait had undertaken similar demarches four years earlier, in order to obtain the posting of advisor he currently held. He added that the Ballhausplatz had only granted his request "to put an end to Leghait's instigations", and suggested that Davignon made it perfectly clear to Leghait that his attitude was not correct.³²⁴ Ever a diplomat, Davignon's chef de cabinet count Léon d'Ursel chose to go for the delicate approach, informing Leghait that "the Minister remembers that a similar demarche has been done with regards to your appointment as advisor in Vienna, and feels that there is a slight incorrection that he wished to signal to you. To ask a foreign Government to recommend us that or that candidate for a Belgian diplomatic posting is on the one hand inviting it to involve itself in our family affairs, and on the other hand to exert on it what could resemble pressure. Both are to be avoided." D'Ursel added that "M. Davignon is convinced that you will not err as to the implications of these remarks that are only meant to maintain the Department's traditions of reserve and prudence."³²⁵ Notwithstanding these soothing words and despite many more requests for promotion by his father and by himself, Leghait had to wait for two more years to become minister-resident.³²⁶

Ever concerned with furthering his son's career, count Gontran de Lichtervelde had other wishes besides obtaining Baudouin's transfer from Beijing back to Europe. He preferred "a city where he can complete his diplomatic education, that is a city where social duties matter". This, Lichtervelde continued, also required "a *cheffesse* who demands from the junior personnel a care for relations with Society."³²⁷ Although young Lichtervelde had to wait for another seven months before being transferred to Europe and did not obtain a secretary posting in Rome – the place that his father found ideally suited for acquiring the social skills necessary in diplomacy –, he did not oppose Baudouin's appointment in Berlin. Jules Greindl's wife, the so-called *cheffesse* of the Belgian legation in the German capital, was the daughter of a Portuguese viscount whose long diplomatic career had led him to become minister plenipotentiary in Brussels. She had moreover been a diplomat's wife for over forty years when Baudouin de Lichtervelde arrived in Berlin in the summer of 1904.³²⁸

³²⁴ AMBZ, PF 186, "Raymond Leghait", Alfred Leghait to Julien Davignon, 27 February and 3 March 1909; Note of the Secretariat-general, 1 March 1909; Raymond Leghait to Julien Davignon, 6 March 1909; Note of Direction P, 17 March 1909.

³²⁵ AMBZ, PF 186, "Raymond Leghait", Léon d'Ursel to Raymond Leghait, 18 March 1909.

³²⁶ AMBZ, PF 186, "Raymond Leghait", Raymond Leghait to Léon d'Ursel, 4 June 1910; Note of the Cabinet, 17 June 1910; Alfred Leghait to Julien Davignon, 8 July 1910.

³²⁷ AMBZ, PF 1531, "Baudouin de Lichtervelde", Gontran de Lichtervelde to Léon Arendt, 5 December 1903.

³²⁸ EPNB, 1989, 302.

In comparison with finding the favour of their superiors and relying on the help from family members, strategies that primarily operated in the early stages of diplomatic careers, intelligent marriages generally enhanced the diplomats' travelling speed throughout the entire journey on Diplomatic Island. During the last decade, historians have elaborated extensively upon the insights of social scientists and have reconsidered the role of diplomats' wives in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³²⁹ The functions of these women amounted to much more than providing their husbands with sufficient financial capital to safeguard their professional future. The social capital that they added to the marriage was just as important. Their wedding indeed often gave diplomats access to a greater and more powerful network of national and international politicians, diplomats and other prominent figures. Finally, the cultural capital embodied by diplomatic wives had a considerable impact on the ways of diplomacy in the early twentieth century. More than today, clear-cut gender patterns dominated the diplomatic social world. Inside the buildings of their legations, wives of diplomats acted as hostesses to visitors from all over the world. In charge of the interior decoration and of the management of dinner parties, they could enhance the representation of the country that their husbands represented. Outside of the legations' walls, they appeared in Society dressed by national designers and took part in charity work and cultural activities. Wives of diplomats were also required to exhibit their knowledge of culture and politics, but in manifesting their intelligence, they had to make sure not to pose any threat to the masculinity of their male conversation partners. In encounters with local prominents and with other diplomats, they were foremost expected to use their feminine beauty and personal charm to gather information and further the interests of the governments that had sent them. Of course, being married to a diplomat entailed more prosaic aspects as well. Especially in legations far away, which were generally understaffed, diplomatic wives often functioned as secretaries to their husbands, deciphering dispatches and copying official correspondence. In crowded legations, by contrast, they had to assist their spouses in the management of junior diplomatic personnel and their families. Given the wide variety of roles they had to assume

³²⁹ The seminal social-scientific work on this subject seems to be HOCHSCHILD, Arlie, "The Role of the Ambassador's Wife: An Explanatory Study", in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 31/1 (1969). More influential was ENLOE, Cynthia, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Berkeley, 1989, chapter five. For an anthropological perspective, see BLACK, Annabel, "Ambiguity and verbal disguise within diplomatic culture", in Joy HENDRY and C.W. WATSON (eds.), *An anthropology of indirect communication*, London, 2001, 255-270 (especially 262-268). Preliminary work from a historical perspective is to be found in CROMWELL, Valerie, "'Married to Affairs of State': Memoirs of the Wives and Daughters of British Diplomats", in George EGERTON (ed.), *Political Memoir: Essays on the Politics of Memory*, Portland, 1994. The topic gained wider popularity thanks to HICKMAN, Katie, *Daughters of Britannia. The lives and times of diplomatic wives*, London, 2000.

and of tasks they were supposed to carry out, diplomats' wives, as contemporary commentators in Europe and the United States seemed to agree, could make or break their husbands' careers. It should thus come as no surprise that Foreign Affairs Departments closely watched over the marriage intentions of their diplomats.³³⁰

In Belgium, this was no different. In 1910, Kerchove had the pleasure to inform the Foreign Minister of "a great event in my life", namely "my engagement with Miss Marguerite Maskens, daughter of Mr and Misses Fernand Maskens." Since his fiancée belonged to "a family of diplomats, having an uncle and two full cousins in the career", he could assure Davignon that "she will be more suited than anyone to support me in the big international life." Kerchove knew that "according to the rules of the Department, your permission is necessary for the marriage of a young attaché."³³¹ He certainly would not have needed to worry, though, for in the decades before the First World War, Foreign Ministers never seem to have denied such requests.³³²

This was partly so because diplomats realized very early in their careers how valuable a suitable wife was for their professional future and which assets she had to possess. In 1895, after her son had been sent as first secretary to the Belgian legation in Washington, the only overseas posting where European bachelor diplomats generally hurried to go to, Buisseret's mother repeatedly inquired "whether there was anything new in the marriage line." After having provided her with numerous descriptions of young women he had met, Buisseret chose to dwell a little longer on one in particular. He did warn his mother that "I am not really in love with her" and thus "do not ... contemplate to marry her", but "simply think her character is very nearly the ideal one of a good wife's." The young woman that Buisseret claimed not to be in love with was a general's daughter named Caroline Story. Starting with Miss Story's outward appearance, Buisseret found her a "young lady [of] 24,5 (not quite young as you see), a little above average size, neither thin nor large (in fact, rather thin), with a nice oval face,

³³⁰ See particularly WOOD, Molly M. , " 'Commanding Beauty' and 'Gentle Charm': American Women and Gender in the Early 20th Century Foreign Service, *Diplomatic History*, 31/3 (2007), 505-530; WOOD, Molly M., "Diplomatic Wives: The Politics of Domesticity and 'the Social Game' in the U.S. Foreign Service, 1905-1941", *Journal of Women's History* 17/2, 2005, 142-165; and DASQUE, Isabelle, "Être femme de diplomate au début du XXe siècle: pouvoir social et pouvoir d'influence", in Yves DENECHERE (ed.), *Femmes et diplomatie. France – XXe siècle*, Brussels, 2005, 23-41.

³³¹ AMBZ, PF 1529, "André de Kerchove de Denterghem", André de Kerchove de Denterghem to Julien Davignon, [1910].

³³² I have encountered only one occasion where a diplomat's marriage plans were not approved by the Foreign Minister. In 1931, Guy Heyndrickx wished to marry Miss Yvonne Delhez. Due to her previous occupation as a 'lyrical artiste', the Foreign Minister and the Secretary-general feared that she might be "a little drama queen", and wished not to run the risk of having her tarnishing Belgium's reputation abroad. Heyndrickx married anyway, and was suspended from active service for more than four years, after which he re-entered the diplomatic career as Belgian minister in Moscou. See AMBZ, PF 1526, "Guy Heyndrickx", Guy Heyndrickx to Paul Hymans, 19 March and 28 April 1931; Fernand Vanlangenhove to Paul Hymans, s.d. [May 1931].

good complexion and teeth, pretty profile, blonde but decidedly thin hair: distinguished and aristocratic looking.” This was quite all right, he seems to have thought. Unfortunately, she met the second criterion less convincingly, as Buisseret confessed: “I am afraid, though I have made no inquiry, that her fortune does not amount to much, and taking the best, she can be nothing more than what they call well-off.” However, she scored very well from a moral and intellectual perspective. Buisseret had to admit that “what appeals to me in her is the most perfect combination of serious and exterior qualities, I mean of seriousness and gaiety. On the one hand she is a most excellent catholic, converted a few years ago, very much occupied with good works, hospitals, schools and so on, and generally very much respected and admired by other girls. She is remarkably well informed on most subjects – Latin, astronomy, botanics, history, and especially philosophy, in which her personal ideas correspond with mine most completely: more a man than a woman’s turn of mind on the whole – but nothing whatever of a blue-stocking. On the other hand, she’s a very good hand at everything of sports – riding etc. always busy with her pony and her dogs.”³³³ Buisseret was very satisfied indeed that Miss Story, although an intelligent young woman, did not use this asset to threaten his masculinity and did not carry any feminist ideas. While her adherence to the Catholic faith was important to Buisseret personally, her devotion to charity and her popularity among other high-born young women constituted invaluable qualities for diplomats’ wives in general.

“As said”, Buisseret repeated, “I’m not really in love with the aforesaid person, simply admiring her as a character and liking her as congenial and attractive. I must add that she has no accomplishments in the way of arts, music or so. Also that she is considered rather pretty, especially since she has, on my warning, completely given up wrinkling her forehead when she talks, [...] which (talking) she does a good deal, but in a quiet, composed way.”³³⁴ Buisseret clearly had some difficulties admitting how fond he really was of Miss Story. He might also have been struck by her saying that she perfectly understood that he might not be able to marry her and that she found it unreasonable for him to give up his profession as a diplomat. Leaving the career, Buisseret had indeed hinted, was “a necessity in case of too limited wealth, and something that I absolutely do not feel like doing.”³³⁵

While it is unclear whether any unexpected inheritance came to enhance the dowry, Buisseret eventually married Miss Caroline Story. In any case, and contrary to the assumption held by many contemporary commentators, there were several European diplomats who did

³³³ CRCCF, FFB, 301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 27 March 1895.

³³⁴ CRCCF, FFB, 301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 27 March 1895.

³³⁵ CRCCF, FFB, 301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 28 August 1895

not consider money the most important criterion when choosing an American bride.³³⁶ Possibly to prepare his mother for what was coming, Buisseret had reported the marriage of a young Swedish diplomat with an American woman of modest means.³³⁷ In Belgian diplomatic circles, Emile de Cartier de Marchienne wedded “out of love” with a girl from Massachusetts who was reported not to possess any fortune, while Ludovic Moncheur married American heiresses in 1887 and 1902, but still claimed that lack of wealth prevented him from accepting most European postings.³³⁸

In addition to the genuine sentiments of affection that these diplomats held for their wives, it is likely that they also valued the often decisive positive influence that their marriage exerted on their career paths. In 1907, first secretary Adhémar Delcoigne wished to speed up the pace of his career by serving in an overseas posting for a couple of years. At that time, only the legation in Beijing could use an agent with the rank of advisor. Four years earlier, a project to send Delcoigne to Beijing had been abandoned because of opposition from Japanese diplomats towards his person. In the meantime, however, the difficulties had been ironed out. Delcoigne had indeed married a German woman, who had done her education in Japan and whose father was held in high esteem by the Japanese authorities. This convinced Arendt and Favereau to name Delcoigne advisor in the Chinese capital. His marriage thus enabled him to overtake a few secretaries who occupied higher positions on the seniority list.³³⁹ In 1909, Buisseret benefited in a similar way from his social capital acquired through marriage. Appointing him head of mission in Washington despite the explicit requests of more senior diplomats to obtain the posting, Arendt argued that American press campaigns against the Congo and the attitude of the US government towards Belgium required an agent in Washington who could swiftly create contacts that allowed him to undertake effective action. “Thanks to his alliance with an American woman who belongs to a highly esteemed family”, Arendt continued, Buisseret would have no difficulties making such contacts.³⁴⁰

The Department’s leading officials were indeed well aware of the services that the American wife of Buisseret’s predecessor in Washington, Ludovic Moncheur, had rendered to the Belgian government. In 1908, the British ambassador to Washington described the Baroness Moncheur as “a handsome American [...] accredited with possessing a certain

³³⁶ See for instance ANONYMOUS, “The Fortune Hunter”, *The Spirit of the Times*, 11 February 1901; ANONYMOUS, “American Wives of British Peers”, *The Scrap Book*, October 1907; and ANONYMOUS, “Heiresses for Princes”, *The New York Times*, 2 August 1908.

³³⁷ CRCCF, FFB, 301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 26 September 1895.

³³⁸ AMBZ, PF 62, “Emile de Cartier de Marchienne”, Conrad de Buisseret to Léon Arendt, 1 October 1909; AMBZ, PF 1226, “Ludovic Moncheur”, Ludovic Moncheur to Léon Arendt, 30 March 1909.

³³⁹ AMBZ, PF 1522, “Adhémar Delcoigne”, Note of Direction P, 24 January and 4 February 1907;

³⁴⁰ AMBZ, PF 113, “Albéric Fallon”, Léon Arendt to Albéric Fallon, 18 February 1909.

influence in political circles, a thing rarely attributed to any Legation, and still more rarely to the feminine head thereof. She is supposed [...] to have managed so as to reduce the Senate Resolution of last year on the Congo question [...] to a colourless form of words.” Since the British ambassador wanted to incite Congress to clearly condemn the policies of the Congo Free State’s sovereign, he was not all too satisfied with the Baroness Moncheur’s alleged actions. This certainly influenced his view of Baron Moncheur who, although “a friendly and well-meaning man”, seemed “at marriage, while endowing his wife with his worldly goods, to have transferred to her the larger part of his intellectual capacity as well.”³⁴¹

On the one hand, the British ambassador seems to have channelled his frustration by attacking the masculinity of Baron Moncheur. To him, the intellectual ability of diplomats to persuade leading politicians into adopting a point of view favourable to one’s own head of state, appears to have been an essentially male quality. He argued that Baron Moncheur had acted weakly by allowing his wife to take credit for this effective diplomatic action. On the other hand, the ambassador clearly admired Baroness Moncheur. At least, that seems to have been the message extracted from his report by a colleague, who wrote that Baroness Moncheur “commands admiration for the degree in which she combines intellectual gifts with the charm of great personal attractions.”³⁴²

Like the British ambassador, the later Belgian Foreign Minister Paul Hymans stressed the diplomatic qualities of the Baroness Moncheur, who was only diplomat’s wife mentioned in his voluminous memoirs. According to Hymans, she “combined the charm of her face and her appearance with a lively intelligence.” Apparently, when the Baroness Moncheur was away from the Baron, she wrote him letters containing her impressions on diplomatic issues which, in Hymans’s opinion, “measured up to diplomatic reports.” Like the British ambassador, Hymans also stressed the American origins of the Baroness, as if they contributed to her successes on the diplomatic scene.³⁴³

Perhaps their provenance from a more egalitarian society indeed determined the aptness of American women for life in the world of diplomacy, where both spouses engaged in a partnership that, although determined by clear-cut gender roles, functioned on the basis of a near-equality of minds. When Buisseret’s mother expressed her worries about what his colleagues thought of his friendship with Miss Story, he replied: “nothing, for in this, from certain viewpoints, rather childlike society, everyone always has a camaraderie with one

³⁴¹ James Bryce quoted in NA, FO 371/2899, n° 190051, Francis Villiers to Edward Grey, 28 September 1917.

³⁴² NA, FO 371/2899, n° 190051, Francis Villiers to Edward Grey, 28 September 1917.

³⁴³ HYMANS, Paul, *Mémoires*, Brussels, 1958, 163.

young girl in particular, who is called ‘your best girl’. Similarly, every girl has always her ‘best boy’.”³⁴⁴

As long as his interests were served, the sovereign of the Congo Free State might not have cared too much about the extent to which Belgian agents and their wives divided their diplomatic activities along gendered patterns. Royal rewards for such activities generally fell to the diplomat alone, though. Baron Moncheur likely stood a good chance of obtaining some, were it not that the timing was bad. In 1907, Leopold II was indeed about to lose his colony to the Belgian state, and lost with it most of his interest in world politics.³⁴⁵ In prior decades, however, diplomats who shared the King’s vision on Belgian imperialism and actively contributed to his colonial oeuvre, seldom came home empty-handed.

In the late nineteenth century, the King was the absolute patron of Belgian diplomacy. Especially at the final stages of the diplomatic career, when junior diplomats were about to be named minister, he could suddenly show up and take over – with considerably more authority – the Political Director’s task of regulating the traffic on the road to glory. Baron Jules Greindl, Leopold II’s old friend and one of the earliest supporters of his plans for overseas expansion, received favour after favour in the early years of the King’s reign. Greindl got his biggest career boost in September 1866, about eight months after Leopold II’s ascendance to the throne and merely sixteen months after his elevation to the rank of advisor. Contrary to the wishes of the Foreign Minister, who wanted to send Greindl to Rio de Janeiro as chargé d’affaires, Leopold II had his friend promoted to minister resident and sent to head the important legation in Istanbul. At that time, Greindl was only thirty-one years old. However, when he increasingly expressed his scepticism about the King’s projects, their friendship cooled off.³⁴⁶ It is telling that Greindl, who continued to distinguish himself and eventually became the moral and intellectual leader of the Belgian diplomatic corps, had to wait for the accession to the throne of King Albert to be conferred the title of count.³⁴⁷ Conversely, Leopold II did not hesitate to elevate diplomats who did fully support his colonial ambitions. In 1891, he bestowed the latter title upon Edouard Degrelle-Rogier, a bourgeois diplomat who left active service to become Foreign Secretary of the Congo Free State. He also named

³⁴⁴ CRCCF, FFB, 301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 26 September 1895.

³⁴⁵ See COOLSAET, *België*, 157-158; VANTHEMSCHE, *Congo*, 51-52.

³⁴⁶ See DELSEMME, *Contribution à l’histoire du corps diplomatique*, 115. See also DIERCKXSENS, *Jules Greindl*; VANHAUWAERT, Hannes, ‘*All the King’s Men*’. *Een zoektocht naar de koloniale ideeën van enkele adviseurs en “handlangers” van Leopold II (1853-1892)*, unpublished Master’s Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2005, Chapter 8; and WILLEQUET, Jacques, “Greindl”, *BN*, 37, 1971, 373-376.

³⁴⁷ DE VLEESHOUWER, *Les Belges devant le danger de guerre 1910-1914*, Leuven-Paris, 1958, 37-38; DUERLOO and JANSSENS, *Wapenboek*, 639-640.

Maurice Joostens a baron in 1904.³⁴⁸ Probably because of his passion for geography and overseas exploration, Joostens had managed very quickly to gain the King's complete confidence. This facilitated his climb up the diplomatic ladder, resulting in an appointment as minister resident in Beijing at the age of thirty-seven, only twelve years after passing the diplomatic exam. His contributions to the King's colonial projects in China earned him, within seven months upon his return, first nomination as head of mission in Madrid, then baronial dignity, and finally elevation to the rank of minister plenipotentiary.³⁴⁹

As will be seen in the next chapter, the highest circles of the aristocracy generally ranked among the staunchest supporters of Leopold II's colonial empire. In June 1904, prince Albert de Ligne was temporarily sent as a secretary to the Belgian legation in Paris, where he would help surmount an unexpected increase of the workload. However, he left the legation without notice after less than eight weeks, only to be heard of a few months later, when his father asked for a meeting with the Secretary-General to plead his son's case. Although Political Director Arendt argued that young Ligne should be urged to go back to Paris and complete his mission, which would have been the only way to have "satisfaction given to the principles of discipline that should reign in the diplomatic corps", Van der Elst and the Foreign Minister decided to give the prince a second chance and to allow him to start over with a clean slate in Lisbon.³⁵⁰ Because of Belgium and Portugal's neighbourliness in Central-Africa, colonial matters determined the workload at the Belgian legation in Lisbon.³⁵¹ Yet the tensions between Ligne and the Department were not immediately eased, and after a mere four weeks at his new posting, the young diplomat asked for a ten days' leave. This was granted to him "by request of the Palace".³⁵² A few weeks later, Arendt was informed that the King wanted Ligne to be placed at his disposition for one year. Overcoming his surprise for

³⁴⁸ DUERLOO and JANSSENS, *Wapenboek*, 1103.

³⁴⁹ Testimony of Joostens' passion for overseas exploration, which he shared with the King, is an article he published after his return from a journey through the inland parts of Egypt: JOOSTENS, Maurice, "Du Caire au Tropique", *Revue de Belgique*, 1886. For his diplomatic activities in China, see DE RIDDER, Koen, "The first diplomatic contacts between Belgium and China: its background and consequences for politics, trade and mission activity", in Ku WEI-YING and Koen DE RIDDER (eds.), *Authentic Chinese Christianity. Preludes to its development (Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)*, Leuven, 2001, 33-66 at 41. Leopold II's appreciation of Joostens is described in VAN DER ELST, "Léopold II et la Chine", 27. See also DUCHESNE, Albert, "Les aspects diplomatiques du projet d'expédition belge en Chine en 1900", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*, 32/1, 77-96; and COOLSAET, *België*, 165-177.

³⁵⁰ AMBZ, PF 1415, "Albert de Ligne", Léon van der Elst, s.d. [mid-October 1904]; Note of Direction P, 21 October 1904; Paul de Favereau to Albert de Ligne, 7 December 1904.

³⁵¹ VANTHEMSCHE, *Congo*, 265.

³⁵² AMBZ, PF 1415, "Albert de Ligne", Albéric Fallon to Paul de Favereau, 29 December 1904; Paul de Favereau to Albéric Fallon, 16 February 1905.

knowing “nothing of this affair but the order of Mister Minister”, Arendt willingly carried out Leopold II’s instructions.³⁵³

Ligne would eventually serve as a section chief and later chef de cabinet at the Congo’s Department of Foreign Affairs until the *reprise* by the Belgian government in late 1908. At this time, he was transferred to the cabinet of the newly established Ministry of Colonies, where he must have felt honoured to be charged with the organization of crown prince Albert’s voyage to the Congo in 1909.³⁵⁴ Yet Ligne appears not to have liked his new professional environment all that much. After all, from being in the service of an absolute monarch concerned with expanding the dynastic lands, Ligne suddenly became a clerk who had to obey to the Christian democratic politician who headed the new Department. Ligne strove, and managed, to re-enter the diplomatic career. However, his interest in the possibilities of overseas territories had been aroused. Asked to communicate his preferences as to the European capital he wished to be sent to, Ligne “put in first place London, ... because my training of four years in the administration of the Congo has made me familiar ... with both national and foreign colonial matters.”³⁵⁵ In the 1920s, Ligne would take a six-month leave to visit the vast plantations he and his cousin Eugène, who entered the diplomatic career in 1919, had just founded in the Congo’s eastern province of Kivu.³⁵⁶

After the failure of Leopold II’s colonial adventures in China and the reprise of the Congo by the Belgian state, the King’s autonomy as a foreign policy actor in peacetime had nearly vanished. Furthermore, Lambermont seems to have successfully infused his lessons to the crown prince about diplomacy and imperialism, with his own ideas about royal colonialism. King Albert manifested no intention indeed to pursue his uncle’s methods of dominance overseas.³⁵⁷

Negotiations surrounding the re-entrance of Albert de Ligne into the diplomatic corps indicate that his attitude towards the informal royal privilege in matters of diplomatic personnel management differed as well. In the summer of 1910, Ligne’s mother had written a long letter to the King’s mother, asking if the King would mind to recommend her son for a posting not too far from Brussels. Arguing that “we have to favour the entrance of the aristocracy into the diplomatic careers”, the King asked Beyens, then Minister of the King’s

³⁵³ AMBZ, PF 1415, “Albert de Ligne”, Paul de Favereau to Léon Arendt, 3 March 1905; Léon Arendt to Paul de Favereau, 15 March 1905.

³⁵⁴ DE LICHTERVELDE, Louis, “Ligne (de), (Prince Albert...)”, *BCB*, 7-A, 1973, 330-331.

³⁵⁵ 1909-1914 en 1919-1934, n° 683, Albert de Ligne to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 19 August 1910.

³⁵⁶ AMBZ, PF 1415, “Albert de Ligne”, Albert de Ligne to Emile Vandervelde, 15 July 1926; S.N., “The Man of the Day. Prince Albert de Ligne”, *Paris Times*, 3 October 1927; DE LIGNE, Antoine, “Ligne (de) (Prince Eugène...), *BCB*, 7-A, 1973, 331-332.

³⁵⁷ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 78-79. COOLSAET, *België*, 181 and 202.

House, to appeal to Davignon. He added that “it would be useful that prince Albert de Ligne knows that the demarche has been made. I hope it will be successful, for he would do very well in one of our big legations.”³⁵⁸ As a consequence of his service in the colonial administration, Ligne by this time had been a first secretary for more than nine years and had thus fallen considerably behind the junior diplomats of his generation. Nevertheless, within six months, by late February 1911, Ligne got his promotion to advisor in The Hague.³⁵⁹

While this appointment undoubtedly benefitted from the King’s intervention, it appears not to have been part of a royal strategy to increase the diplomatic corps’ number of ‘aristocrats’, which in the King’s opinion might have meant a somewhat more exclusive social group than the aggregate of families of pre-nineteenth-century nobility.³⁶⁰ In any case, no additional evidence of royal demarches has been found, nor was there any significant increase in the number of junior diplomats of old noble lineage that entered the career before 1914.³⁶¹ Rather was the demarche a personal favour to an old friend. King Albert was born as the youngest child and second son of the Leopold II’s brother, less than four months after prince Albert de Ligne saw the light of day in arguably the most prominent aristocratic family in the country.³⁶² Their mutual consideration was consolidated two years later when the King accepted to godfather Ligne’s new-born son.³⁶³ Furthermore, the third King of the Belgians might have had the authority to impose his wishes but seems to have refrained from doing so and left the diplomatic movement largely for the Foreign Minister and his leading officials to decide. Probably the King could have pushed through to give Ligne his coveted position of advisor in London. Due to a number of sudden bereavements at the top of the diplomatic hierarchy, it would have been easy to promote the advisor in Britain, Joseph Mélot, who was eligible to head a minor legation.³⁶⁴ Furthermore, Mélot actually got his promotion two weeks after Ligne’s appointment in The Hague, whereas the new advisor in London, Paul May, might not have been entirely to the liking of the King. During the First World War, the King

³⁵⁸ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 21, Albert de Belgique to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 9 August 1910.

³⁵⁹ ADCB, 1913-1914, 157.

³⁶⁰ Albert’s conception of aristocracy likely coincided to a great extent with how Ellis Wasson defined this group, i.e. as nobles from “substantial landed families who upheld a unique set of aristocratic values relating to family and honor and who perceived it their duty to rule.” See WASSON, *Aristocracy*, 19.

³⁶¹ Between August 1910 and January 1914, sixteen men entered the career. Of these, eight were roturiers. The others came from families that held nobility since the early nineteenth century (one), the late eighteenth century (one) or before that (six).

³⁶² I realize that issues of aristocratic seniority are sensitive material. See HOUTAERT, Jean-François, *Anciennes familles de la Belgique*, Brussels, 2008.

³⁶³ AKP, AE, n° 69, Albert de Ligne to Albert de Belgique, 29 August and 8 September 1912.

³⁶⁴ In late July, both ministers plenipotentiary in Madrid and Tokyo died well-before the age of retirement. Baron Maurice Joostens was forty-seven; Baron Albert d’Anethan was sixty-one. See DE LICHTERVELDE, Baudouin, “JOOSTENS (Adolphe-Marie-Maurice)”, *BCB*, 4, 1955, 448-450; and ANONYMOUS, “Baron d’Anethan, *The New York Times*, 25 July 1910.

is reported to have said about May, who was of Jewish descent: “The Jews, in general, do not have a lot of tact. It is not desirable to have them in diplomacy. But I cannot practice anti-Semitism”.³⁶⁵

Possibly with this moral limitation in mind, the King might have overcome his prejudices and accepted the appointment of May. Arguably, morality was also the ingredient which Albert felt the monarchy needed to be infused with after the death of Leopold II, who, as Viaene has so vividly captured, “was as much a sexual predator on the European rivieras as his men were in the African *brousse*.”³⁶⁶ Albert also wished to restore the reputation of the monarchy by shaking off the autocratic image of his predecessor and stimulating a slightly more democratic polity for the country. On the international scene, unbridled imperialism needed to make way for restored neutrality.³⁶⁷ These convictions might have contributed to the King’s less imposing attitude in matters of diplomatic personnel policy.

Surely, the impact of this stand of the new King might not have made a great difference in the case of junior diplomats such as prince Albert de Ligne. It would have changed more in the decision process about which senior diplomats to send to the country’s top legations. Berlin, Paris, London, Vienna and Saint-Petersburg were the capitals of the states that not only dominated European politics, but also guaranteed Belgian neutrality. Throughout the nineteenth century, the heads of mission sent to the guarantors were hand-picked by the Belgian Kings. They also stayed at their postings for a very long time. In the spring of 1911, the court in Berlin had received only three Belgian ministers plenipotentiary since 1845, and Whitehall only six since 1831, while five had been sent to Paris since 1848, and merely four to Vienna since 1833.³⁶⁸ Because of the great distance to Belgium, the less flourishing social life and the harsher climate, Saint Petersburg was the least popular of the big legations. This was reflected in the slightly higher number of ministers sent to Russia since the opening of the Belgian legation, but also in the fact that diplomats preferred not to end their careers there. In 1866, Count Louis de Jonghe d’Ardoye managed to leave Saint Petersburg for Vienna, while in 1903 Alfred Leghait traded the imperial city for Paris.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁵ Albert quoted in ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst, n° 123, Frederic van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 10 January 1917.

³⁶⁶ VIAENE, Vincent, “King Leopold’s Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party, 1860-1905”, *Journal of Modern History*, 80/4, 2008, 789.

³⁶⁷ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 10-11 and 78-79; COOLSAET, *België*, 203-203

³⁶⁸ By contrast, the number of Belgian heads of mission sent to Rio since 1832 amounted to twenty and to Mexico-city since 1879 to eight, while seven senior diplomats were appointed in Beijing since 1888 and five in Tehran since 1890. See ADCB, 1930, 301-329.

³⁶⁹ There were eight heads of mission sent to Saint Petersburg between 1853 and the spring of 1911, see ADCB, 1930, 323.

The predominance of the King in deciding which diplomat to send to the top legations, seems to have lasted until the last years of Leopold II's life. Nevertheless, in January 1909, that is less than a year before the King died, Arendt still acted somewhat surprised upon hearing that Leopold II had not made any objection to the Department's decision to send Baron Beyens to Berlin. Since Leopold II "had merely asked with a smile if Beyens was not too 'French'", Arendt knew that the King did not actually care anymore. His successor surely did, but also avoided to push his will through. Meeting with Davignon for the first time as head of state at a 1910 New Years' reception, Albert at first sight seems to have used the ministerial decision that appointed Baron Paul Guillaume as minister plenipotentiary of the legation in Paris, to subtly establish his authority. The King stated that he held Guillaume in high regard, and that if the old diplomat would not have received the promotion, he would certainly have drawn Guillaume's merits to the Foreign Minister's attention.³⁷⁰ However, this seems to have been a gesture of approval rather than one to impose his power.

The Holes in the Road

In order to be considered eligible for one of these top postings, most diplomats were willing to make sacrifices. Many of them indeed accepted, albeit with a certain reluctance, the principle that the deeper the hole a diplomat voluntarily jumped into, the brighter his career perspectives. In the last three decades before the First World War, there were only six diplomats that became minister resident after being advisor for only four years or less. Two of them went to Rio, one to Mexico, two others to Tehran, and another one to Beijing.

Diplomats only headed these legations because doing so considerably enhanced the pace of their career. In 1886, Buisseret wrote to his mother that "I should rather like [...] to go to Rio de Janeiro! The journey should be paid, I would be immediately secretary with 2,000 francs, and very often 'chargé d'affaires'..., and the advancement is very rapid."³⁷¹ Until 1889, Brazil was ruled by emperors of Portuguese royal blood, who had installed a regime that in many ways was reminiscent of European monarchies in the *ancien régime* and where the titled nobility occupied prominent positions in society and politics. The federal republic constituted afterwards by a new elite of coffee barons appealed considerably less to an aristocratic diplomat like Buisseret.³⁷² Because it could further his career, he nevertheless

³⁷⁰ AMBZ, PF 143, "Paul Guillaume", Julien Davignon to Léon Arendt, s.d. [early January 1910].

³⁷¹ CRCCF, FFB, 301/1/1, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 26 August 1886.

³⁷² See Chapter Two. See also LEVINE, Robert M., *The History of Brazil*, Houndmills, 2003, 55-85 (especially 61-65 and 71-76).

decided to go there for more than a year as *chargé d'affaires ad interim*. The only other Belgian legation in Latin-America headed by a member of the diplomatic corps, stood in Mexico-City. Opened in 1865 to recognize the newly established Second Mexican Empire of Leopold I's son-in-law Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, it was shut down after the assassination of the emperor two and a half years later. Belgian industrial and commercial interests eventually spurred the government to reopen the legation during the first years of the Porfiriato, the regime lead by the republican general Porfirio Diaz between 1876 and 1911.³⁷³ Like many of his colleagues, Charles Wauters, minister resident in Mexico-City from late 1905 until late 1908, truly loathed the posting. Arendt noted that Wauters had started writing letters of complaint almost immediately upon his arrival, and that he never stopped recommending himself for any posting that would be available in Europe. While Wauters must have known that accepting an overseas legation meant leading it for at least a few years, he kept on sending similar letters until he finally obtained his return to Europe almost three years later.³⁷⁴ Such letters of diplomats seem to have been intended to emphasize that their presence overseas was foremost a token of goodwill that required reciprocity within a limited time span.

Because Belgian industrialists ranked among the first and prime investors in Persia and China, the country's diplomats enjoyed a more privileged status than in the Latin American capitals. This might have explained the slightly higher esteem in which the legations in Tehran and Beijing were held.³⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Paul de Groote, head of mission in Tehran, explicitly stated that he had only accepted to go to Persia provided that his stay would be short and that his career would prosper from it. Although no official rules were established as to the duration of a diplomat's first tour of duty as minister, terms of three years seem to have been customary. Aware that De Groote certainly knew this and still tried to shorten this time span, the Foreign Minister firmly refused to accept his argumentation. He did, however, acknowledge that a stay overseas was "worthy of consideration" when postings in Europe

³⁷³ CARCAN-CHANEL, N, "Rôle des intérêts et des ambitions économiques de la Belgique dans l'histoire de ses relations diplomatiques", in Carcan-Chanel, N & Delsemme, M, *Agents diplomatiques belges et étrangers aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, Brussels, 1968, 68-73; DELCORDE, Raoul, *Les diplomates belges*, Brussels, 2010, 43-45; KRAUZE, Enriqué, *Mexico: Biography of Power. A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, New York, 1997, Chapters 8 and 9.

³⁷⁴ AMBZ, PF 387, "Charles Wauters", Note of Direction P, 7 February 1907 and 11 June 1908; Charles Wauters to Léon Arendt, 25 May 1908 and 20 June 1908.

³⁷⁵ See DUMOULIN, Michel, "Les premières années de la présence belge en Perse (1887-1895)", *BTNG*, 8/1-2, 1977, 1-52; DE RIDDER, Koen, "The first diplomatic contacts between Belgium and China", 33-66.

needed new chiefs.³⁷⁶ Because senior advisors knew that very well, overseas legations sometimes became objects of desire. In 1910, Count George della Faille de Leverghem, third on the seniority list of advisors, found it “very hard and unjust to be hit by the most painful measure that could touch an agent” when Emile de Cartier de Marchienne, number four on the list, was appointed to head the legation in Beijing. “I do not question the right of the Minister to make his choice, in exceptionally grave circumstances, without reckoning with the seniority of the agents”, Faille acknowledged in a personal letter to the chef de cabinet, “but I feel it would have been possible to arrange matters without causing to [number two] Mr. Leghait and I the real harm done to us, and which ... will have a disastrous repercussion on the whole continuation of our careers.” He concluded uttering the wish that d’Ursel himself would never be overtaken, for then he would have to experience “the feeling of bitter discouragement with which I write these lines.”³⁷⁷

In the decades before the First World War, the principle of seniority had become deeply rooted in the minds of Belgian diplomats. Every departure from it led the aggrieved to feel that their honour had been besmirched. In the very few cases where seniority was disregarded, the Foreign Minister and his closest collaborators took great care to repair the damage. So when the legation in Tokyo opened up in late 1910 and Leghait declined the offer to lead it, Della Faille got the job and thus more than what he had asked for six months earlier.³⁷⁸ During the late nineteenth century, processes of industrialization and militarization had turned Japan into a sizeable international power, while political and social reforms inspired by Western models had managed to provide the country with a fairly stable regime. China, by contrast, was prey to civil disorder and impending revolution. Most European diplomats understandably preferred to be stationed in Tokyo rather than in Beijing.³⁷⁹ Perhaps more importantly for della Faille, the legation was a second rather than a first posting for a diplomat named minister. His predecessors came from Mexico and Rio, the latter having spent the last seventeen years of his diplomatic career in the Japanese capital.³⁸⁰ Having overtaken three diplomats upon acceptance of the Beijing legation, Cartier, for his part, only

³⁷⁶ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Groote”, Paul de Favereau to Paul de Groote, 5 and 19 January 1899; Paul de Groote to Paul de Favereau, 6 January 1899. See also AMBZ, PF 147, “Emmanuel Havenith”, Emmanuel Havenith to Julien Davignon, 30 December 1907.

³⁷⁷ AMBZ, PF 1404, “Georges della Faille de Leverghem”, Georges della Faille de Leverghem to Léon d’Ursel, 4 June 1910.

³⁷⁸ AMBZ, PF 1404, “Georges della Faille de Leverghem”, Georges della Faille de Leverghem to Léon van der Elst, 1 November 1910; ADCB, 1913-14, 143.

³⁷⁹ CULLEN, L.M., *A History of Japan. Internal and External Worlds*, Cambridge, 2003, chapter 7; GRAY, Jack, *Rebellions and Revolutions. China from the 1800s to 2000*, Oxford, 2003, Chapter 6; CECIL, *The German diplomatic service*, 170; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 172-174.

³⁸⁰ See Georges Neyt in ADCB, 1901, 119; and Baron Albert d’Anethan in ADCB, 1910, 137.

looked forward. Nearly half a year after arriving in China, he felt “aggrieved” that the legation in Washington had suddenly opened up and that it thus could not be assigned to him. To lead the legation in Washington one day, Cartier admitted, “was a dream, that has not come true, which often happens to dreams.”³⁸¹ The capital on the Potomac was much sought after by junior and senior diplomats alike, especially because of its vibrant social life and the considerable number of suitable diplomatic wives to be found there. Furthermore, although the economic and political importance of the United States only kept growing in the decades before the First World War, the workload at the Belgian legation in Washington appears to have remained rather limited.³⁸² Around the turn of the century, this paradox contributed to transforming the legation from a first into a second-tour mission for ministers.³⁸³

Of the twenty-nine diplomats active in the spring of 1911 who were promoted to minister-resident abroad between 1884 and 1914, eighteen accepted Rio, Mexico, Tehran or Beijing as their first posting. Four others were sent to one of the Balkan legations (Belgrade, Athens and Bucharest), while three advisors accepted Cairo or Tangiers as their first posting as ministers. Two were appointed in Luxemburg, and one in Lisbon. Diplomats generally held these legations on the European borderlands in higher regard than the missions overseas. This was not only because of the shorter distances to Brussels but also because the pattern in prior diplomatic movements had created precedents as to their rank in the hierarchy of postings. Of the twenty-four diplomats active in the spring of 1911 who did their second tour of duty abroad between 1884 and 1914, eight were appointed to lead one of these legations, whereas

³⁸¹ AMBZ, PF 62, “Emile de Cartier de Marchienne”, Emile de Cartier de Marchienne to Léon d’Ursel, 20 March 1911.

³⁸² As mentioned before, six Belgian diplomats who were active in the spring of 1911 had by then married American wives. However, also several of those who eventually found their spouses elsewhere, were very active in Washington’s high society matrimonial market. An attaché at the Belgian legation in 1896, Paul May was about to marry the daughter of an American general when his mother, in a successful effort to stop the marriage, managed to convince the Foreign Minister to have her son transferred immediately to Tokyo. See AMBZ, PF 4853, “Paul May”, Note of Direction P, 24 September 1896; ANONYMOUS, “To Wed A Jew”, *The Evening News (Detroit)*, 28 October 1896; Paul de Favereau to Paul May, 15 October 1896; Paul May to Paul de Favereau, 4 November 1896. Six years later, Charles Wauters, advisor at the legation in Washington, was long considered the prime contender for the hand of the President’s daughter. See AMBZ, PF 387, “Charles Wauters”, ANONYMOUS, “The Rival Suitors for the Hand of Little Miss Roosevelt”, [May 1902]; ANONYMOUS, “Les prétendants de miss Roosevelt”, *La Réforme*, 6 June 1902. Adhémar Delcoigne was seemingly the only junior diplomat who disliked the posting. Just before leaving for Washington, Delcoigne got married, which might have been why he took no interest at all in Washington night life. He also complained that he could not make himself useful in a legation where the work could be handled by one person working half an hour a day. See AMBZ, PF 1522, “Adhémar Delcoigne”, Adhémar Delcoigne to Albert de Bassompierre, 31 October 1905.

³⁸³ While for both Alfred Leghait, in 1889, and Count Gontran de Lichtervelde, in 1896, the legation in Washington was the first they led, Baron Ludovic Moncheur arrived in Washington in 1901 after four years spent as head of mission in Mexico, Count Conrad de Buisseret in 1909 after seven years in Tangiers, and Emmanuel Havenith in 1911 after more than three years in Tehran. Only the latter three had American wives. See ADCB, 1901, 94-128; and 1913-14, 131-174.

five others did their first and second three-year terms there. Furthermore, legations in the Balkan, on the Mediterranean, and in Luxemburg and Lisbon, still counted for the third tours of duty of about half of these diplomats. By this stage of their career, all had left the overseas missions of Rio, Mexico, Tehran and Beijing.³⁸⁴

However, this does not mean that they were happy to stay on the outskirts of the continent. Although less frequently than those coming from the overseas missions, the Political Director regularly received personal letters from diplomats serving on the European periphery who solicited transfers to more prestigious legations. However, their honour required diplomats to only accept postings that truly constituted an improvement. As such, Baron Albéric Fallon felt quite insulted when, after four years in Rio and six in Lisbon, the best missions Arendt could offer him were Cairo and Bucharest.³⁸⁵ Fallon knew that accepting to lead one of these legations might have pulled him out of the race for a couple of years, and thus threatened his advancement towards a more prestigious posting. Still, Fallon's honour suffered less badly than that of Maurice Michotte de Welle. In 1907, the necessity to put a more senior diplomat in charge of the legation in Bern required the transfer of Michotte, who headed the mission temporarily. Since only Stockholm and Belgrade were vacant, Michotte saw his whole world collapsing. Pulling himself back together, he wrote to the Foreign Minister: "Alea jacta est. I can only beg you to soften the lot that I have been condemned to ... I do not vilify my judges; I only ask to choose the place where I will lay my head on the block."³⁸⁶

Because he was not extremely wealthy and wanted to be closer to his children, whom he had sent to a private school in Switzerland, Michotte eventually chose the less expensive and less remote Serbian capital over Stockholm. While life in Belgrade had become much more comfortable compared to the first two decades after the opening of the Belgian legation on the borders of the Save in 1880, most diplomats would nevertheless still have preferred to lead the missions in the Scandinavian capitals of Stockholm and Copenhagen.³⁸⁷ There, the workload was limited and diplomatic social life much more flourishing. The legations in Scandinavia were also very clearly identified as second, or even third tour of duty missions. Ever since the 1880s, they moreover seem to have functioned as rewards to diplomats who

³⁸⁴ ADCB, 1910, 137-171; and 1913-14, 131-174.

³⁸⁵ AMBZ, PF 113, "Albéric Fallon", Léon Arendt to Albéric Fallon, 18 February 1909. See also AMBZ, PF 109, "Gaston Errebault de Dudzeele", Gaston Errebault de Dudzeele to Henri de Merode, 26 December 1893.

³⁸⁶ AMBZ, PF 226, "Maurice Michotte de Welle", Maurice Michotte de Welle to Julien Davignon, 27 May 1907.

³⁸⁷ AMBZ, PF 226, "Maurice Michotte de Welle", Werner van den Steen de Jehay to Frederic van den Steen de Jehay, 19 May 1907; Note of Direction P, 22 June 1907; CECIL, *The German diplomatic service*, 162.

had endured considerable hardship in faraway postings.³⁸⁸ However, apart from a single exception, diplomats did all they could not to be left forgotten in these Nordic countries. They also knew that from Scandinavia, end-of-the-road missions were in sight, and that, although with little chance of success, these could be asked for without sounding unreasonable. In 1910, Paul de Groote was offered the legation in Madrid after more than four years spent in Copenhagen. He could not accept, he argued, for “the least they can give me to repair the injustice inflicted upon me” was the posting in Rome. De Groote was referring to the nomination of Fallon, who had been wise to turn down Bucharest and Cairo, to the legation in The Hague earlier that year. The injustice consisted in the lesser seniority of Fallon in the rank of minister plenipotentiary. Ironically enough, the Department did apply the principle of seniority for the choice of the minister to send to Rome, and De Groote saw the Italian capital assigned to an older diplomat. Awaiting brighter horizons, De Groote eventually suggested to give him Bern. This request he obtained.³⁸⁹

Bern ranked with Madrid, Istanbul and The Hague among the last stretches of road that a diplomat had to travel before gaining access to the legations that were generally considered as coronations of a diplomatic career. While altering appreciations of diplomatic life in these four capitals tended to influence the appeal they had on diplomats, career patterns might have had a greater impact. When De Groote was offered to head the legation in Madrid in late 1910, he knew that his predecessor Maurice Joostens had arrived in Spain after less than five years spent in Beijing. Since both predecessors of Joostens had left Madrid for Rome, he might have feared that after twelve years of leading legations in Tehran, Athens and Copenhagen, spending half of that time in Madrid would only lead to Rome.³⁹⁰ The Italian capital was renowned for its vibrant Society and limited workload, which made it an ideal place for reaping the fruits of a long career. However, diplomats in their fifties who still had enough ambition and energy left, surely aimed higher. They knew that in the previous

³⁸⁸ The Belgian legation in Copenhagen only opened in 1906. Before that, a Belgian minister with residence in Stockholm was accredited at both courts. The first minister to arrive in Copenhagen was Paul de Groote, who had led the Belgian legations in Tehran and Athens for respectively five and two-and-a-half years. Edouard de Grelle-Rogier succeeded him in 1910, after spending four years in Rio. Georges Allart had spent more than three years in Mexico when he took over the legation after De Grelle's untimely death in 1911. From 1892 until 1908, Baron Frédéric Daelman was head of mission in Stockholm, after having spent more than eight years in Mexico. Also Charles Wauters, Daelman's successor, arrived in the Swedish capital from Mexico-City. The 1930 edition of the ADCB contains information about the succession of heads of mission at every Belgian legation since 1830 (see pp. 301-329).

³⁸⁹ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Groote”, Paul de Groote to Albert de Bassompierre, 25 and 30 September 1910; ADCB, 1913-14, 147.

³⁹⁰ Joostens' predecessors were Théodore de Bounder de Melsbroeck, who left Madrid in 1894 for the Holy See, and Léon Verhaeghe de Naeyer, who left Madrid in 1903 for the Quirinal. See AR, 1894 and 1895; and ADCB, 1901, 125-126.

decades, The Hague had led to Paris, Istanbul to Vienna, and Bern to London.³⁹¹ More than Paris and Vienna, London seems to have exerted a particularly strong attraction to diplomats, aristocrats and bourgeois alike. Just a few weeks after his arrival, Baron Henri de Woelmont informed Arendt that “London is the ideal post for me, and nowhere in the world ... would I feel any happier.”³⁹² Writing from Madrid in August 1900, Charles Wauters got a bit more emotional when looking back at a year and a half spent in the British capital: “The dream I have had all my life, and the sole ambition of my career, has always been to arrive in London ... I hope that if the gates of Paradise open, you will think of me.”³⁹³

Yet Wauters would never reach the gates of paradise. After sixteen years and ten months in the diplomatic career, which – as Kerchove had calculated – was about what an average journey took, he became minister resident in Mexico. Three years later, he went to Stockholm, where he got his promotion to minister plenipotentiary and eventually stayed for more than eleven years, spending the First World War in neutral Sweden. At the end of 1918, Wauters felt the time was ripe for a promotion and solicited Washington, which he knew would become the first of eight Belgian embassies created immediately after the First World War. However, Wauters was sent to Athens, which could not really be considered a promotion, while the Washington embassy went to a diplomat ranked seven places below him on the seniority list.³⁹⁴ The First World War would indeed seriously alter the career paths of many diplomats.

At the time Kerchove and his wife had their written exchange, in the spring of 1911, seniority still was the determining factor in issues of promotion. Rather than modesty, it was Kerchove’s awareness of this fact that most likely led him to present himself to Marguerite as an average traveller. Due to the minor differences in delay that exam results entailed, they indeed only – and rather slightly – influenced rankings among diplomats who became second secretary in the same year. Appealing to powerful family members and friends hardly changed anything either. While these could really facilitate the journey towards Diplomatic Island, they could at best make the initial stops on the roads of that island a little more

³⁹¹ Both Baron Auguste d’Anethan, in 1894, and Paul Guillaume, in 1910, had been transferred from The Hague to Paris, while in the meantime Count Edouard de Grelle-Rogier had left the Dutch capital for Saint Petersburg in 1903. Both Baron Emile de Borchgrave, in 1891, and Count Gaston Errebault de Dudzele, in 1909, went from Istanbul to Vienna. Whereas Bern only led Count Werner van den Steen de Jehay to Rome in 1910, Count Charles de Lalaing managed to use it as a springboard to London. Information about their career paths can be found in the 1901 and 1913-14 editions of the ADCB.

³⁹² AMBZ, PF 1407, “Henri de Woelmont”, Henri de Woelmont to Léon Arendt, 10 April 1906.

³⁹³ AMBZ, PF 387, “Charles Wauters”, Charles Wauters to Léon Arendt, 23 August 1900.

³⁹⁴ AMBZ, PF 387, “Charles Wauters”, Charles Wauters to Paul Hymans, 14 December 1918; ROOSENS, *Agents diplomatiques*, v; ADCB, 1913-14, 131-174; ADCB, 1921, 151.

comfortable. Once on the road, effective help could only come from fellow travellers who shared the diplomats' goal. In that respect, travelling together with a woman who possessed a talent for diplomacy could prove fruitful. Also self-abnegation mostly had a purifying influence, as halting for some time at the least attractive stops along the road and carrying out the dirtier work, could ultimately accelerate one's travelling speed. The best of strategies had long been to contribute to the oeuvre of the Belgian resort's ruler, but as the twentieth century's first decade drew to its close, and the management of that oeuvre devolved on to elected politicians, the fruits of such labour could no longer be taken for granted.

§4. Collecting the Glory

The Belgian King's great influence in foreign policy matters and his power to make or break the careers of Belgian diplomats, constituted but a few of a variety of reasons for which he occupied such a central position in the mental world of Belgian diplomats. His function as "Fountain of Honours" also contributed to this disposition.³⁹⁵ The Belgian King was indeed the sovereign of the five national chivalric orders, the most important of which was the Order of Leopold. This Order dated from the early days of Belgian independence and rewarded "especially distinguished service to the Fatherland."³⁹⁶ Between December 1888 and August 1900, Leopold II instituted four new orders, all of which were related to his African oeuvre. These were the Order of the African Star, the Order of the Lion, the Order of the Crown, and the Order of Leopold II. Like the Order of Leopold, they counted five grades (Grand Cordon/Cross, Grand Officer, Commander, Officer and Knight), but contrary to the older order, they also awarded palms and medals.³⁹⁷

Despite the finality of these distinctions, diplomats seem to have encountered the honours provided by the Order of Leopold along the way, regardless of the distinctive character of their services. However, when they would receive the different decorations that the diplomatic career had in store, seemed to have been largely determined by a combination of favour, coincidence, and merit. Whereas most diplomats became Knights in the Order of Leopold between their thirteenth and their sixteenth year of service, the most active

³⁹⁵ CANNADINE, David, *Ornamentalism : How the British Saw Their Empire*, Oxford, 2002, 85-100 at 100.

³⁹⁶ GARCIA DE LA VEGA, Désiré, *Guide pratique des agents politiques du Ministère des affaires étrangères de Belgique. Cérémonial national et cérémonial de la cour*, Paris, 1899, 121.

³⁹⁷ BORNÉ, André-Charles, *Distinctions honorifiques de la Belgique, 1830-1945*, Brussels, 1985, 19-20.

contributors to the King's oeuvre were granted this favour several years earlier.³⁹⁸ The principle of seniority had a greater impact on promotions to the ranks of Officer and Commander: nearly all Knights advanced to Officer after seven to eleven years in their grade, while Officers had to serve King and Country the same amount of time before becoming Commander. Here the 'coincidental' aspect came into play, in the sense that state visits by the Belgian King, which occurred frequently in the last decades before the First World War, generally entailed an advancement in one of the national Orders, mostly in the Order of Leopold, for the diplomat accredited to the Head of that state.³⁹⁹ In some occasions, merit, or more precisely a combination of favour and merit, could certainly circumvent the principle of seniority. It happened in 1900, when the Belgian diplomats in Beijing were caught in the turmoil caused by the Boxer Uprising. Leopold II praised them for their heroism and wished to honour them.⁴⁰⁰ As such, Emile de Cartier de Marchienne became the first legation secretary in almost four decades to earn the rank of Knight in the Order of Leopold. He had entered the diplomatic corps merely seven-and-a-half years earlier. Maurice Joostens, head of the legation and one of the King's favourites, obtained the grade of Officer in the same order less than two years after Leopold II had bestowed the Knighthood upon him.⁴⁰¹

It seems that after the death of Leopold II, the practice of awarding diplomats grades in the Order of Leopold according to seniority, became ever more institutionalized. Merits on the job and achievements in fields other than foreign policy execution were still rewarded but with different distinctions. In 1913, Paul May, head of the legation in Mexico, recommended his secretary Pol Le Tellier in the most laudatory terms for the "extraordinary *sang-froid* and decisiveness" that the young diplomat had shown during recent upheavals in the country. May judged a distinction to be an appropriate reward for such a commendable demeanour.⁴⁰² Instead of a Knighthood in the Order of Leopold, which would not have been that exceptional after more than ten years of service, Le Tellier received a Knighthood in the lower Order of the Crown.⁴⁰³ A stranger situation occurred when, as a token of the King's gratitude for their services in the colonial administration, Pierre Orts and Prince Albert de Ligne became

³⁹⁸ During the reign of Leopold II, Emile de Cartier de Marchienne became Knight of the Order of Leopold after seven-and-a-half years of service, while it took Baron Paul Guillaume ten years and four months, and Léon Capelle and Count Charles de Lalaing ten years and five months each. See ADCB, 1913-14, 131-174.

³⁹⁹ AMBZ, PF 341, "Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay", Julien Davignon to Albert de Belgique, s.d. [April 1914]; PF 1195, "Fernand Van der Heyden", Note of Direction P, 5 October 1911.

⁴⁰⁰ KURGAN-VAN HENTENRYK, Ginette, *Léopold II et les groupes financiers belges en Chine : la politique royale et ses prolongements (1895-1914)*, Brussels, 1971, 295 and 378-379; VAN DER ELST, "Léopold II", 27.

⁴⁰¹ In 1862, first secretary Jules Greindl became Knight in the Order of Leopold, after seven years and seven months in the diplomatic career. See ADCB, 1910, 143, 150-151, and 155.

⁴⁰² AMBZ, PF 2282, "Pol Le Tellier", Paul May to Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, 4 March 1913.

⁴⁰³ ADCB, 1913-14, 156.

Officers in the Order of the Crown not long before being awarded Knighthood in the Order of Leopold on account of their services in the diplomatic corps.⁴⁰⁴

Yet more important than inquiring into the practice of awarding distinctions is the question of whether diplomats actually cared about receiving them and why. Looking for answers in historiography would yield a meagre harvest. The many prosopographic studies published about the pre-1914 diplomatic communities of European countries do not tackle the question.⁴⁰⁵ In her as yet unpublished social-cultural history of the diplomats of the French Third Republic, Isabelle Dasque does devote some attention to the issue of what distinctions in the national orders meant to diplomats. At one place in her dissertation, she seems to agree with the protagonists of her story. These claimed to be largely indifferent on a personal level to such distinctions, and to care for them only because of their professional value as symbols of the trust and appreciation that diplomats enjoyed from the governments that sent them.⁴⁰⁶ Yet such comments by agents who represented a republic might also be interpreted as efforts to conform themselves to the ideology of their polity. Arguing, elsewhere in her dissertation, that French diplomats often requested senior colleagues to formally present them with a decoration they had received, Dasque indeed suggests that they also prized these honours as markers of their membership of the diplomatic community.⁴⁰⁷

As representatives of a monarchy, Belgian diplomats could add another dimension to the value of decorations. In Belgium, like in other monarchies, distinctions also symbolized a personal tie between the royal giver and his subject. In the case of Belgian diplomats, they might have served to formalize the unequal relationship between the King and his representative abroad, in a manner that reminded of early modern court patronage. Such a relationship entailed a certain reciprocity, as the receiver of the distinction had to continue to prove his worthiness of the favour his patron had bestowed upon him, often with the expectation of more favours to come. In a way, the diplomat's decorations carried a similar meaning as the golden chain that early modern princes awarded to their courtiers and with which they tied them to their service.⁴⁰⁸ Leopold II's creation of four new national orders that were all devoted to his personal oeuvre of overseas expansion, testifies that he, like other European monarchs, advocated this approach to honours.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁴ ADCB, 1913-14, 157 and 162-163.

⁴⁰⁵ See the literature cited in the Introduction.

⁴⁰⁶ DASQUE, *A la recherche*, 683.

⁴⁰⁷ DASQUE, *A la recherche*, 821-824.

⁴⁰⁸ Compare with CANNADINE, *Ornamentalism*, 100.

⁴⁰⁹ Kaiser Wilhelm II manifested his attitude towards decorations more explicitly, defining them as "visible demonstrations of favour by the monarch based on a subjective judgment of individual service". See

Students of decorations in both Imperial Germany and Republican France have identified these distinctions as techniques of government that transcended the traditional social cleavages of the *Ancien Régime* and sanctioned the social hierarchy by bringing about the fusion of the elites of different social groups.⁴¹⁰ As such, the practice might have also fit perfectly well in the strategies of King Leopold II and his circle to cope with the onset of the political democratization of Belgian society. As will be shown in the next chapter, these strategies were primarily directed towards overcoming the cleavages between the country's 'modern' and 'traditional' elites.

Alastair Thompson has argued that in the case of Imperial Germany, the highest distinctions went to members of the ruling elite, among which the diplomatic corps figured prominently, and that they were virtually the only ones who genuinely cared for these objects of vanity.⁴¹¹ For the Belgian diplomatic corps, a mixture of traditional and modern elites, it could be argued that honours were regarded by the former group as confirmation of the prestige they had formerly held but that was liable to erosion in times of democratization and by the latter group as means to acquire the same social-cultural standing as the ones whose lifestyle they wished to emulate.

Yet on a more practical level, decorations also had an impact on day-to-day interactions between diplomats, both between those of the same diplomatic corps, and between those of different countries. In September 1912, Baron Beyens received congratulations from the Political Director for the King's bestowal upon him of the Grand Cordon of the Order of Leopold II, which was one of the highest distinctions the King could award to any civil servant. Beyens claimed to owe this extreme honour to the King's desire to give him a decoration "as a souvenir of the few years that I have spent at the Palace." Since Grand Cordons were normally granted only upon retirement to diplomats with very successful careers, it was somewhat remarkable that Beyens, only fifty-seven at that time, expressed the hope "that my old comrades who have, like me, the honour to represent Belgium abroad, will soon enjoy the same favour and will also be able to adorn themselves in their respective posts with a national Grand Cordon."⁴¹² Notwithstanding its probable sincerity, a touch of competitiveness does hover over Beyens's wish that his colleagues would get favoured as

THOMPSON, Alistair, "Honours Uneven: Decorations, the State and Bourgeois Society in Imperial Germany", *Past & Present*, 144, 1994, 177.

⁴¹⁰ See the essays in DUMONS, Bruno and Gilles POLLET (eds.), *La Fabrique de l'Honneur. Les médailles et les décorations en France, XIX-XXe siècles*, Rennes, 2009. See also THOMPSON, "Honours", 171-204.

⁴¹¹ THOMPSON, "Honours", 202-203.

⁴¹² AMBZ, PF 31, "Eugène-Napoléon Beyens", Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, 9 September 1912.

much as he had been. For although solidarity prevailed among the travellers on the road to glory, only one could be the best.

Aware of the tensions that competition between diplomats could provoke, officials at the Department tried to regulate the conferral of distinctions as much as possible. Upon his return from The Hague Peace Conference in late 1907, Baron Guillaume subtly noted in a letter to Davignon that “while most governments have already conferred very high rewards to their delegates, so far I have not heard anything about the Tsar awarding any distinction to his representatives in The Hague. There is discontent and bad humour!”⁴¹³ Arendt immediately grasped the message that Guillaume wanted to convey, and asked Alfred de Ridder, the official who dealt with the administration of the national orders, to evaluate his request. De Ridder argued that the only decoration that could possibly be conferred upon Guillaume, was the grade of Grand Officer in the Order of Leopold. Three obstacles separated Guillaume’s wish from satisfaction. First, precedents had determined a seniority of at least ten years in the previous grade of Commander, and Guillaume only counted six. Second, no precedents existed that would grant diplomats a distinction for the sole motive of participating in a conference. Third, promoting Guillaume would mean letting him overtake Marguerite’s uncle Léon Maskens, a senior colleague who had ten years of seniority as a Commander. All this considered, De Ridder concluded, “it is certain that feelings of humiliations will arise elsewhere, and they will be justified.”⁴¹⁴

Guillaume eventually became Grand Officer in the Order of Leopold two-and-a-half years later, counting seven-and-a-half years of seniority. The explanation that Davignon sent to the King ran: “because his behaviour at the latest Peace Conference in the Hague has procured him in the foreign diplomatic corps an esteem and an authority flattering for him and useful for his compatriots.”⁴¹⁵ While Davignon’s – or more likely Arendt’s – phrasing was intended to stress the merit and the excellence of the services that Guillaume had rendered to the state, its timing served to accommodate the principle of seniority that guided the conferral of decorations. More importantly, it served to avoid offending senior diplomats, as Guillaume was not promoted before Maskens, upon retirement, had received his advancement in the Order of Leopold.⁴¹⁶

The predominance of the principle of seniority in largely determining both the diplomats’ career pace and the number and quality of the distinctions they would receive,

⁴¹³ AMBZ, PF 143, “Paul Guillaume”, Paul Guillaume to Julien Davignon, 28 December 1907.

⁴¹⁴ AMBZ, PF 143, “Paul Guillaume”, Alfred de Ridder to Julien Davignon, 24 January 1908.

⁴¹⁵ AMBZ, PF 143, “Paul Guillaume”, Julien Davignon to Albert de Belgique, 6 July 1910.

⁴¹⁶ ADCB, 1913-14, 149.

contributed to making Diplomatic Island a relatively safe place for investing large amounts of time and money. The titles and decorations that diplomacy had in store for its careerists functioned as outward signs of the dignity that could be deployed as markers of distinction in the social world in which diplomats moved and in the more and more egalitarian society that they eventually had to return to. For Kerchove, and for many of his colleagues, these fruits encountered along the roads on Diplomatic Island certainly increased the allure of spending their careers there.

CHAPTER 3. THE PERSPECTIVE OF DEMOCRATIZATION

But what about Maggie? The previous chapter has indeed neglected the young countess de Kerchove's opinion about her husband's search for prestige. Marguerite did not agree. While acknowledging that "there is indeed a little vanity", she objected that "the advantage is too light to put in the balance". What about our children, she asked, their education will suffer from it, and they will grow up "without knowing what a 'Fatherland' or a true 'Home' really mean." After raising further objections, Marguerite concluded: "I believe that without hesitation we have to leave the career, which for a bit of glory gives less true happiness, for a bit of life in Society with strangers, makes us forgotten in our own fatherland, by our friends, and our family."

Yet Kerchove did present himself at the 1911 session of the diplomatic exam, and despite his wife's plain objections, he did embark upon a diplomatic career. Without any doubt, he valued very highly the social and intellectual advantages of a life in diplomacy. But was that all there was to it? Might the pull factors not have been complemented, perhaps overshadowed even, by motives that pushed him away from life in Belgium?

Among the advantages of a diplomatic career, Kerchove also listed that "our intellectuality will pay off far better in diplomacy, because less curtailed by the bigoted and narrow ideas of our small country." He explained that "for the moment, democracy or demagoguery has the wind in its sails. Let it blow! It is inevitable that one day, an intellectual leading party will regain power, and no longer 'mandate hunters'. That day, I will step forward." Kerchove was indeed convinced that "the fact of belonging to the aristocracy and to an intelligent elite does not accord well with a government of the popular masses", and repeated once more that "a moment will come when the intelligent aristocratic classes ... take back power. That day will be my day." Marguerite judged it to be expedient not to disagree with her husband on this last point.

This chapter inquires to what extent other diplomats active in the decades before the First World War might have shared Kerchove's opinions. To that purpose, it will first put the social stratification of the Belgian diplomatic corps in a diachronic perspective, and then try to explain how the transformation of the field of politics under the influence of democratization made a career in diplomacy more attractive to young men of high birth and great wealth. As will be argued afterwards, changes in the world of Belgian diplomacy after 1885 increased the appeal of the diplomatic career as well.

§1. The 'Aristocratization' of the Diplomatic Career

At the time that Kerchove reflected about his professional future, Belgian diplomats seem to have counted an overwhelming presence of noblemen in their ranks. Given that the numbers presented in the first chapter only represent the diplomatic corps' social stratification at one random moment, the indications that they give can only carry some weight if put in their wider historical contexts. However, any statistics about the aristocratic ascendancy of the Belgian diplomatic corps may at most serve as a useful leg up to qualitative analyses. The fact indeed remains that, at any time between October 1842, when the Organic Decree of the Diplomatic Corps founded the Belgian diplomatic career, and the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, the number of diplomats in active service remained relatively small, ranging from thirty-four in 1850 to eighty-five in 1910.⁴¹⁷

Belgian historians have provided data that could illustrate the diachronic perspective. Roosens found that “for the years before the First World War” and of “all diplomatic agents put together”, “about 70 per cent” had noble status.⁴¹⁸ Delsemme, who only looked into the 169 diplomats that entered the foreign service between 1831 and 1850, came to a similar result. Contrary to Roosens, she did differentiate between the 109 (or 65 per cent) “diplomats of old nobility” and the eleven men who had been ennobled by the Belgian King.⁴¹⁹ However, neither Delsemme nor Roosens give any indications about how the noble share of the foreign service personnel evolved throughout the nineteenth century. In a commendable effort to partly rewrite these prosopographic studies, Gertjan Leenders analysed the presence of noblemen in the Belgian diplomatic corps for each year between 1840 and 2000. He presents figures that roughly situate the noble share between 40 and 45 per cent in the 1850s, and around 50 per cent in the 1860s and the 1870s. In the decades before the First World War, the relative number of noblemen further increased to about 60 per cent.⁴²⁰ Despite the fact that a number of methodological issues seriously undermine his results, the apparent tendency that he reveals towards a career that aristocratizes while society democratizes is quite tantalizing.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷ These numbers are drawn from AR, 1843-1914; and from ADCB, 1901, 1905, 1910, and 1913-1914.

⁴¹⁸ ROOSENS, “L'accès à la carrière”, 141.

⁴¹⁹ DELSEMME, “Quelques aspects sociaux”, 30.

⁴²⁰ LEENDERS, Gertjan, *Een adellijk bastion? Adellijke vertegenwoordiging in de Belgische diplomatie 1840-2000*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Universiteit Gent, 2012, 116-118.

⁴²¹ First, Leenders considers as diplomats only those who at a given time occupied a posting at a foreign legation, and thus overlooks the members of the diplomatic corps who spent their careers attached to the Royal Palace, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or in some cases, to other ministerial departments. Second, when distinguishing between older and more recent nobility, Leenders focuses on families rather than on individual diplomats, which

Survey year	Nobility <1555	Nobility >1555-1795<	Total	Nobility > 1795	Total	Roturiers
1842/12/22	17.4 (8/46)	47,8 (22/46)	65.2	0 (0/46)	65.2	34.8 (16/46)
1850	0 (0/34)	52,9 (18/34)	52.9	5.9 (2/34)	58.8	41.2 (14/34)
1860	4,3 (2/46)	34,8 (16/46)	39.1	10.9 (5/46)	50.0	50.0 (23/46)
1870	7,5 (5/67)	29,9 (20/67)	37.3	13.4 (7/67)	46.3	52.2 (35/67)
1880	9,8 (6/61)	31,1 (19/61)	41.0	21.3 (13/61)	62.3	37.7 (23/61)
1884/01/18	8.5 (5/59)	30.5 (18/59)	39.0	22.0 (13/59)	61.0	39.0 (23/59)
1885	10,3 (6/58)	34,5 (20/58)	44.8	20,7 (12/58)	65.5	34.5 (20/58)
1890	9,4 (6/64)	37,5 (24/64)	46.9	25 (16/64)	71.9	28.1 (18/64)
1894/12/15	12,3 (8/65)	33,8 (22/65)	46.2	21.5 (14/65)	67.7	32.3 (21/65)
1899/12/15	11.8 (8/68)	29.4 (20/68)	41.2	27.9 (19/68)	69.1	30.9 (21/68)
1905/01/01	17.5 (14/80)	28.8 (23/80)	46.3	25 (20/80)	70.3	28.8 (23/80)
1910/07/01	20.0 (17/85)	29.4 (25/85)	49.4	27.1 (23/85)	76.5	23.5 (20/85)
1911/04/23	20,3 (16/79)	30,4 (24/79)	50.7	24.0 (19/79)	74.7	25,3 (20/79)

Table 1: Share of nobles and roturiers in the Belgian diplomatic corps, 1842-1911

Surveying the social stratification of the Belgian diplomatic corps since its official foundation in 1842, I have chosen to differentiate between diplomats of families whose nobility dates from the Middle Ages (before 1555), diplomats of “ancien régime” aristocratic lineage (ennoblement before 1795), diplomats whose ancestors or who themselves were ennobled by the Belgian Kings and who had been granted noble status at the time of the survey, and bourgeois diplomats. The results obtained in this way point towards a very gradual ‘de-aristocratization’ between the late 1840s and the early 1880s, and towards an equally gradual ‘re-aristocratization’ of the diplomatic career from the mid-1880s onwards. In the early 1840s, almost two out of every three Belgian diplomats had noble status; this number dropped to less than half in 1870 but then increased to more than three out of every four in 1910.

This development was more or less obfuscated by the slight overall increase throughout the late nineteenth century of diplomats of more recent nobility. The members of this group could be divided into, on the one hand, diplomats whose services the King

does not allow to measure the exact number of diplomatic agents whose ancestors were ennobled before the nineteenth century. More importantly, in establishing the aristocratic seniority of these families, he often seems to equate concession of nobility with recognition of nobility and with admission in the nobility of the Belgian Kingdom. This has led him to suggest that several dozens of diplomats from aristocratic dynasties of at least more than two centuries old, were actually of nineteenth century noble extraction. To name just a few of these families: the counts d’Arschot-Schoonhoven, the princes Riquet de Caraman Chimay, the counts Van den Steen de Jehay, the counts Van der Straten-Ponthoz, the barons de Woelmont. Each of these families produced several Belgian diplomats. See LEENDERS, *Een adellijk bastion*, 92-97 and 124-128.

rewarded with concession of nobility, and on the other hand, sons of politicians and civil servants who had been granted the same favour. However, if we would only take into account diplomats from families whose noble origins went back to the ancien régime, the relative decrease in the number of aristocrats during roughly the third quarter of the nineteenth century is more pronounced. Yet their relative increase during the three decades before the First World War is still considerable.

In so far as the available data from other countries indicate, a similar pattern manifested itself in other European countries as well. Admittedly, the aristocratic presence in Republican France's diplomatic corps radically evolved in the opposite direction, almost decimating between the mid-1880s and the First World War. Yet in most other European countries, the aristocracy seems to have consolidated its dominance of the foreign service. Whereas 84 per cent of German diplomats active between 1871 and 1914 belonged to the aristocracy, the noble share in 1909 lay 10 per cent higher and included a slightly higher portion of men from the oldest noble families.⁴²² Throughout the late nineteenth century, a similar tendency towards ever greater social exclusivity took place in the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic corps, equally resulting in 94 per cent of all diplomats having noble status at the eve of the Great War.⁴²³ The aristocratic bias in the British foreign service was never so overwhelming, but in the decade before 1914 the sons of "the great families of England" increasingly found their way to Whitehall.⁴²⁴ Comparing the share of nobles in the Dutch diplomatic corps, Hans Niezing found that it increased from 86 per cent in 1897 to 91 per cent in 1913.⁴²⁵

If these data are correct, the Belgian case of a slightly aristocratizing diplomatic corps in a democratizing society seems to have fit well in a wider, European trend. Yet before inquiring into the Belgian dimension of this 're-aristocratization', a few notes on the Belgian diplomatic corps' 'de-aristocratization' about half a century earlier might prove clarifying. As it seemed, both developments were influenced by processes of democratization 'external' to the diplomatic corps.

⁴²² OTTE, "Outdoor relief", 32 and 35

⁴²³ OTTE, "Outdoor relief", 37-38; GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 16-19.

⁴²⁴ STEINER, *The Foreign Office*, 20.

⁴²⁵ NIEZING, "De Nederlandse diplomaat", 9. However, it should be noted that throughout this period the total number of Dutch career diplomats was so small (twenty-seven in 1897 and thirty-three in 1913) that a claim for an aristocratizing diplomatic corps cannot be substantiated.

§ 2. The Extensions of Civic Democracy

Democratizing the Franchise

During the 1840s, more than six out of ten Belgian diplomats belonged to ancien regime aristocratic families, and among them there were numerous counts as well as several marquises and princes, some of whom belonged to Belgium's oldest noble families. In his monumental *The Transformation of European Politics*, Paul Schroeder has captured the international scene in which they operated as "too closely linked in the public mind [...] with a domestic political and social order already past its peak when it was created [in 1815], certain to be superseded or overthrown, and widely perceived as oppressive and stifling."⁴²⁶ Yet, as high-born representatives of a king who carried out his own foreign policy independent of a government elected on the basis of a limited suffrage, these men might actually have felt right at home in this world.

After the revolutions of 1848, some of them left the diplomatic corps. Others followed over the next decades. The revolutions and their consequences indeed made some capitals where Leopold I preferred to send aristocrats, – such as Paris, Rome, Frankfurt and Madrid, – into less attractive places for the highest nobility to dwell. Furthermore, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the rise of nationalism limited Leopold I's room for manoeuvre on the European scene, so that diplomats became less the embodiments of the King, as they had been throughout the ancien régime, and more the representatives of the Belgian government.⁴²⁷ For many noble diplomats, this shifting function might not have matched how they saw themselves, especially since most aristocrats did not share many of the opinions of the men in power.

Apart from a few intermezzos, the Liberal Party dominated Belgian political life between 1847 and 1884. Before that, Belgium had been led by unionist governments that tried to overcome ideological differences between Catholics and Liberals in order to consolidate the new state. From the early 1840s onwards, however, this unionism received far greater support from the Catholic aristocracy, who followed the lead of the King and the Catholic Church, than from the liberal bourgeoisie, who had organized itself in a political party the year before. The Liberal Party's 1847 election victory tipped the fragile equilibrium between Liberals and Catholics, and the paradigm of party politics gradually entered parliament.

⁴²⁶ SCHROEDER, Paul, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848*, Oxford, 1994, 803.

⁴²⁷ On the diplomat as embodiment of his sovereign in early modern Europe, see ROOSEN, William, "Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial: A Systems Approach", *The Journal of Modern History*, 52/3, 1980, 459.

Increasingly, debates about the organization of society were held in the public sphere. While little changed in the ways parliamentarians interacted, and party discipline did not yet determine the MP's voting behaviour, Catholics and Liberals did feel the need to create and mobilize public opinion to support their ideas. The written press contributed to popularising political debates.⁴²⁸

Opinions expressed in newspapers indeed gained importance, as the stamp tax was abolished in 1848 and more people could afford to buy newspapers. The Liberal government had passed the stamp tax abolition to politicize the part of the middle classes to which it had granted the suffrage in the same year. This extension of the franchise, which doubled the electorate and consolidated the Liberal Party's power base, was the government's principal response to the 1848 revolutions elsewhere on the European continent. During the following decades, the social composition of parliament would reflect the ideological division within Belgian high society: the Liberal Party's predominantly bourgeois MP's occupied the left side of the hemicycle, while the Catholic cause was largely voiced by aristocrats sitting on the right-hand side of the speaker.⁴²⁹

Considering these processes of democratization from this viewpoint, they could also explain why there were still many aristocrats who stayed in the diplomatic corps or joined it in the 1850s and the 1860s. In this period, the relative number of scions of pre-modern noble families who served King and country as diplomats indeed never dropped below one out of three. These were times when the King might have lost some of his authority in Belgian foreign-policy making but still remained the principal actor in this field. More importantly, the culture of the diplomatic corps had become ever more infused with a feeling of superiority towards what diplomats called the 'political populace' in parliament. In the eyes of many among them, these politicians seemed simply unable to understand that the fate of the country lay in its foreign policy, and that only unionism and patriotism could enhance Belgium's prestige and political power.⁴³⁰ This self-fashioned image of conservative dignity and exclusivity that surrounded the Belgian diplomatic corps might well have appealed to those

⁴²⁸ GUBIN, Eliane, and Jean-Pierre NANDRIN, "Het liberale en burgerlijke België, 1846-1878", in WITTE, *Nieuwe Geschiedenis van België, deel I*, 239-240, and 432; LAMBERTS, Emiel, "Het ultramontanisme", in Emiel LAMBERTS (ed.) *De kruistocht tegen het liberalisme. Facetten van het ultramontanisme in België*, Leuven, 1984, 42-45.

⁴²⁹ GUBIN and NANDRIN, "Het liberale en burgerlijke België", 252-260.

⁴³⁰ VIAENE, "Leopold I", 129-130 and 138-139. In this regard, the case of Eugène de Kerckhove is interesting. Some time after he was forced to leave the diplomatic corps due to limited financial means, Kerckhove ended up in parliament. There, he set himself up as the apologist of the unionist ideas of Belgium's founders and pleaded against the rise of partisan politics. See for instance DE KERCKHOVE, Eugène, *Situation et avenir. Simples réflexions historiques et politiques*, Antwerp, 1846.

aristocrats who preferred an elegant life abroad above the opposition banks in parliament or a sequestered existence in provincial chateaus.

Nevertheless, and all things considered, between 1847 and 1884 conservative forces predominated within the Liberal Party and among Catholic politicians. During the three decades before the First World War this was bound to change, as both groups had to come to terms with the most fundamental political transformations since the Belgian Revolution in 1830. Around 1885, not long after legislative elections granted an absolute majority to Catholic politicians, who would hold the reins of power until the war broke out, the economic crisis reached rock bottom. Socialist leaders founded the Belgian Workers Party and organized mass protests and general strikes in order to obtain extensions of the franchise that included the entire adult male population. They received support from democratic forces among elected Liberal and Catholic politicians. Radical Liberals had urged to democratise voting rights ever since the late 1860s but had always encountered fierce opposition from their fellow party members. However, in the early 1890s, they were backed by a number of Christian democratic parliamentarians from Brussels. Together, they put forward a bill for the introduction of a 'one man, one vote' franchise. Parliamentary rejection of this bill led them to moderate their demands, but also incited socialists to organize another general strike, which was bloodily suppressed. In the spring of 1893, years of social struggle finally convinced the majority of the political establishment to accept a system of plural voting rights for male citizens, as the best means to gradually integrate the working classes into political society. However, since this compromise maintained the preponderance of the propertied and intellectual classes, granting their members one or two extra votes, democratic parliamentarians continued to strive for equal voting rights for all adult male citizens.⁴³¹

Diplomatic Reactions

Apart from a few exceptions, the firmest opposition against the extensions of the franchise to the working classes had come from the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie, the very social environments that Belgian diplomats came from. The inevitability of universal suffrage had even led Joseph Mélot's father Ernest to resign as Minister of Interior Affairs in 1891, while Kerchove's father Oswald, an MP for the Liberal Party, vainly tried to prevent the

⁴³¹ WITTE, *Politieke geschiedenis*, 107-133; DENECKERE, "1878-1905", 500-538; DUMOULIN, "Het ontluiken van de twintigste eeuw", 749-750.

introduction of the new suffrage system by promoting a bill that would enfranchise only those who had a certain degree of schooling.⁴³²

At first sight, Jules Lejeune seems to have been an exception. His father, Belgium's Minister of Justice from 1887 until 1894, could hardly be labelled a democrat, but did count several friends among progressive liberals and Christian democrats, and also seems to have favoured the franchise bill of 1893.⁴³³ The young diplomat, however, held somewhat more conservative ideas. In a note entitled 'Reflections on the best form of government' and likely written in the late 1880s, some years before he entered the diplomatic corps, Lejeune expressed his dislike for the republic, which would only lead to "despotism, or honest people domineered by those who are not." The Belgian parliamentary monarchy as it was conceived in the late 1880s, did not please him either: he wanted "a hereditary House of Lords" instead of the elected Senate. Lejeune did concede that seats of the Chamber of Representatives needed to be divided by some form of elections, but found it "very displeasing that the Senate, for fear of offending some innkeeper, cannot speak with enough authority."⁴³⁴

Lejeune – or Lejeune de Münsbach, as he would be called from 1913 onwards, – was one of many bourgeois diplomats with pronounced aristocratic aspirations, which at least partially explains why he favoured strengthening the aristocratic element of government. If turned into a hereditary House of Lords, the Senate, whose membership in the 1870s was still almost sixty per cent aristocratic (and more than eighty per cent if only Catholic Senators are taken into account), would indeed be less susceptible to the vagaries of innkeepers, who made up about twelve per cent of the electorate and traditionally supported the Liberal Party.⁴³⁵

More generally, the ideology of Ultramontanism that Lejeune professed led him to plead for government by traditional elites. Ultramontanism in nineteenth century Belgium, Emiel Lamberts has argued, was a Catholic variant of anti-liberal traditionalism. It strove for the restoration of the Catholic Church's independence and social predominance. Most ultramontane Catholics did accept the Belgian political system, but wished to conduct a confessional policy within its constitutional limits.⁴³⁶ Surely, this did not prevent them from

⁴³² DENECKERE, "1878-1905", 522 and 528; LORY, Jacques, "La question de la réforme électorale et la loi des capacitaires du 24 août 1883" in John GILISSEN and Pierre GOFFIN (eds.) *Liber Americum John Gilissen: Code et Constitution, mélanges historiques. Wetboek en Grondwet in historisch perspectief*, Antwerp, 1983, 249-274.

⁴³³ See CHRISTIAENSEN, *Tussen klassieke en moderne criminele politiek*.

⁴³⁴ ARA, I 147, "Papiers de Jules Le Jeune", n° 9, "Réflexions sur la meilleure forme de Gouvernement", s.d. [>1888-1890<].

⁴³⁵ GUBIN and NANDRIN, "Het liberale en burgerlijke België", 360; JANSSENS, *De evolutie van de Belgische adel*, 315.

⁴³⁶ LAMBERTS, "Het ultramontanisme in België 1830-1914", in Emiel LAMBERTS (ed.), *De kruistocht tegen het liberalisme. Facetten van het ultramontanisme in België in de 19de eeuw*, Leuven, 1984, 38-39 and 52.

propagating the worldly supremacy of the Papacy. That Lejeune felt the same way, becomes clear from the letters he sent in his early diplomatic career to Emile Van Becelaere, a moderate Liberal and local politician from Brussels. Writing from Rome, where he was sent in 1899 as second secretary of the Belgian legation to the Italian King, Lejeune alternated disparaging comments about the Italian ruling dynasty, with glorifications of the Pope, whom he described as “the only authority in the world, ... the ultimate judge and the only truth”.⁴³⁷ His aversion towards the Italian king primarily sprung from the Risorgimento, which had led to, as he labelled it, the “dethronement” of the Pope in favour of the House of Savoy.⁴³⁸ It had nothing to do with the principle of monarchy, which he continued to embrace. In his note on the forms of government, Lejeune had even claimed that “absolute monarchy would be the best of regimes if people were sure to have truly Christian kings.” Unfortunately for him, he had to regret that “we are far from that.”⁴³⁹

This final comment was probably a reference to Leopold II’s extramarital escapades, which led Lejeune – and many other Belgians – to feel that the King had tarnished the monarchy’s reputation. Yet it does not conceal Lejeune’s nostalgia towards *ancien régime* social structures. Such nostalgia, Lamberts has explained, was very common among ultramontane Catholics, and implied a principal rejection of modern liberties. In a similar vein, ultramontanism opposed the principle of equality: people were naturally unequal and therefore had to be guided by society’s elite. Lamberts also shows how ultramontanism evolved throughout the nineteenth century and assumed different forms. In the 1880s, some ultramontane Catholics started to seek an alliance with more democratic tendencies. Others, especially those aristocrats and upper bourgeois, continued to reject any democratization of society.⁴⁴⁰ His early diplomatic career took Lejeune from Rome to Athens, where he witnessed similar social upheavals. Lejeune acknowledged the deplorable social circumstances of the Greek and Italian masses, but seemed convinced that extensions of the franchise would not solve anything. By contrast, in a country afflicted by chaos and where the masses lived in horrible conditions and lacked any culture, Lejeune had to agree with Kerchove that democratization would only lead to demagoguery.⁴⁴¹ On one occasion, his

⁴³⁷ ARA, I 147, “Papiers de Jules Le Jeune”, n° 35, Jules Lejeune to Emile Van Becelaere, 16 April 1899 (quote), 9 February 1900, 10 April 1900, 27 February 1902, 31 December 1902, 15 February 1903.

⁴³⁸ ARA, I 147, “Papiers de Jules Le Jeune”, n° 35, Jules Lejeune to Emile Van Becelaere, 9 February 1900; SPENCER, *Italy*, 151-195.

⁴³⁹ ARA, I 147, “Papiers de Jules Le Jeune”, n° 9, “Correspondance reçue de ses parents pendant sa carrière diplomatique (1899-1906)”, “Réflexions sur la meilleure forme de Gouvernement”, s.d. [>1888-1890<].

⁴⁴⁰ LAMBERTS, “Het ultramontanisme”, 38-39 and 54-56.

⁴⁴¹ ARA, I 147, “Papiers de Jules Le Jeune”, n° 35, Jules Lejeune to Emile Van Becelaere, 9 February 1900, 27 August 1901, 26 November 1901, and 11 April 1903.

description of Greek domestic politics led him to more general reflections about how European parliamentary systems did not really serve the interests of the masses: “The politicians do their squabbles: Is the parliament not the nation? The peoples are being used to vote and the imbecile John Bull, drunk with his sovereignty, lets himself be swindled by the most impudent [politicians].”⁴⁴²

Similar to Lejeune in his letters to the Liberal politician from Brussels, other members of the ultramontane high bourgeoisie and aristocracy pleaded for a solidary, hierarchical society in newspapers such as *Le Bien Public* and in journals like *Le Magasin scientifique et littéraire*.⁴⁴³ Among these publicists there were several aspiring diplomats. A few months after he had submitted to *Le Magasin scientifique et littéraire* an article that ascribed the French defeat in 1870 to an intervention from God to overcome a Masonic conspiracy, Conrad de Buisseret got tough on universal suffrage.⁴⁴⁴ In June 1886, he published an opinion piece in the Catholic newspaper *Le Patriote*, whose editors actually favoured universal male suffrage. Buisseret, by contrast, contended that extending the franchise to all adult men, would inevitably lead to the establishment of a Republic. As the French example had shown, Buisseret argued, nothing good could ever come from such regime.

The antimodernist vein of the article becomes clear from the outset: “One should keep up with the times, isn’t that true? One should understand or at least know how to discuss without passion the great modern ideas. HUM! That notion, I admit, has always seemed a little vague to me; it encloses [...] a number of principles [...] of an at least contestable truth. It comprises not only freedom of opinion but also non-denominational education, and the equality of all citizens and universal suffrage. Ah! Let us stop here for a moment: here we have the most modern of modern ideas, the sublime word that the impure mouth of tyranny has never breathed. But I, who keep up with the times, I am free to give my opinion; and since one can discuss, let us discuss.” Yet, Buisseret argued, if we would evaluate the fifteen years’ existence of the French Third Republic, we see Catholics being chased out of their churches with gunfire, the populace massacring industrialists with the consent of the government, and still “the people complain a hundred times more than in tributary Belgium.” Buisseret warned that universal suffrage lay at the very core of this situation: “The Republic is the pure and

⁴⁴² ARA, I 147, “Papiers de Jules Le Jeune”, n° 35, Jules Lejeune to Emile Van Becelaere, 7 March 1901.

⁴⁴³ For *Le Bien public*, see CORNELIS, B., “Le Bien Public: Vaandeldrager van het ultramontanisme, 1853-1878”, in LAMBERTS, *De kruistocht tegen het liberalisme*, 110-135. For *Le Magasin littéraire et scientifique*, see VERBRUGGEN, *Schrijverschap*, 195, 204-205, 222 and 346.

⁴⁴⁴ See DE BUISSERET-STEENBECQUE DE BLARENGHIEN, Conrad, “Un ressort politique et social”, *Le Magasin littéraire et scientifique*, 15 January 1886, 69-70; and “République et suffrage universel”, *Le Patriote*, 26 June 1886.

rational application of this principle: the participation of all, without distinction, in the government by way of suffrage. Every Frenchmen, whether an admiral or a chiffonier, freely appoints his legislators.” Buisseret clearly failed to grasp why anyone would favour such a situation. He was indeed convinced that “the friends of the people are elsewhere. They do not speak, [...] they act through their Christian works [...]: works of charity that spread alms in the most obscure recesses of the great cities, works of propaganda that warm the desperate with a ray of hope and love.” Only in the ranks of these friends of the people, Buisseret continued, the men who could guide the country through the contemporary social upheavals were to be found. “Searching for the remedy for the social disease elsewhere”, he concluded, “would be asking the void to create.”⁴⁴⁵

While Buisseret’s argumentation could have easily done without this last remark, he might not have been able to resist the urge to implicitly restate his disbelief that the working classes could ever become fully fledged political participants. Lamberts has argued that, as Belgian socialism increasingly gained support among the masses, the ultramontane Catholics of the upper classes eventually came to adopt a more social and democratic stance. It is doubtful, however, whether the Belgian diplomats among them ever agreed to such a change of disposition towards the common people. Glorifications of the person of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), known for his conservative social vision, recur in both the writings of Buisseret and Lejeune.⁴⁴⁶ Other ultramontane Catholic diplomats, who might well have made up half of the Belgian diplomatic corps, are likely to have similarly preferred the reign of this pope over his slightly less antimodernist and more socially orientated predecessor Leo XIII.⁴⁴⁷ About one out of ten Belgian diplomats active in the spring of 1911 had close family members who had fought as papal Zouaves against the Italian revolutionaries in the 1860s. Nearly all were members of the country’s oldest noble families. Baron Maximilien d’Erp lost his brother in the Battle of Mentana, while the fathers of both Prince Albert de Ligne and Count Louis d’Ursel had been appointed officers in the army of the Zouaves. The latter, Count Charles

⁴⁴⁵ DE BUISSERET-STEENBECQUE DE BLARENGHIEN, Conrad, “République et suffrage universel”, *Le Patriote*, 26 June 1886.

⁴⁴⁶ ARA, I 147, “Papiers de Jules Le Jeune”, n° 35, Jules Lejeune to Emile Van Becelaere, 9 February 1900; BUISSERET, “Un resort”, 69-70.

⁴⁴⁷ Jules Lejeune was actually quite explicit about this. In his description of one of the candidates for the succession of Leo XIII, Lejeune noted that “if it pleases God to have him wear the tiara, with a temperament, a character different from that of Leo XIII he will be able to defend with glory, I am sure of it, the imprescriptible rights of the Church. See ARA, I 147, “Papiers de Jules Le Jeune”, n° 35, Jules Lejeune to Emile Van Becelaere, 2 December 1902. Also the Belgian senior diplomat Count Gontran de Lichtervelde expressed his reluctance towards Leo XIII’s social ideas. See MARY, Michel, “Le Comte Gontran de Lichtervelde: une vie au service d’idéaux”, *Annales du Cercle royal d’Histoire et d’Archéologie du Canton de Soignies*, 28, 2006, 66-68.

d'Ursel, afterwards joined the Belgian diplomatic corps, just like Count Gaston d'Arschot Schoonhoven, a former Zouave soldier and uncle to Count Guillaume.⁴⁴⁸

No family members of Count Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay – ‘Fritz’, as friends and colleagues amicably called him – had served in the papal army. However, his grandfather was appointed minister plenipotentiary to the Holy See in the 1840s and his father was a papal count.⁴⁴⁹ In the years before he entered the diplomatic career, Van den Steen did occasionally contribute to the ultramontane Catholic press. In a series of articles published in *Le Magasin littéraire et scientifique*, he warned against the moral consequences of Auguste Comte and Hyppolite Taine’s positivism. In his discourse, he implicitly opposed the vices of modernism and democratization to the virtues of traditionalism and Christianity. Contrary to more traditional forms of philosophy, which were seemingly accessible only to “the higher spheres of society” since grasping them required “some sort of aristocratic scepticism”, Van den Steen argued, positivism was “a philosophy within reach of everyone and especially of those who are far from keen on profound meditations.” Furthermore, the empirical approach of this methodology, which according to Van den Steen was all too typical for the spirit of modern times, could lead these men to propagate that the existence of God could be ignored. “Needless to point out the effects that such language could have on the masses”, the author concluded.⁴⁵⁰

Just weeks after he entered the diplomatic corps in early 1887, Van den Steen was attached to the Household of King Leopold II. Six years and two promotions later, the King sent the young diplomat on a mission to Latin America. There he acquired first-hand experience with the revolutionary climate of republican regimes, which might have convinced him that he witnessed the materialization of his fears about the consequences of demagogy. As he confided to a friend, “the entire world is crumbling, old Europe just as much as young America”. After further sentiments imbued with *fin-de-siècle* pessimism, Van den Steen referred to the extensions of the franchise that Belgian Parliament had recently voted. Notwithstanding his three votes as holder of multiple university degrees, he failed to grasp the

⁴⁴⁸ About the Belgian Zouaves, less than 2,000 in total, see STEVENS, F., “Een goudmijn voor genealogen en geschiedschrijvers. De Dienstverbintenissen bij de Pauselijke Troepen (1860)”, *Belgische Tijdschrift voor Militaire Geschiedenis*, 20/1, 1973, 53-78 and Id., “Over de Belgische Zouaven in Pauselijke dienst gevallen”, *Belgische Tijdschrift voor Militaire Geschiedenis*, 23/5, 1980, 447-464. See also the published memoirs of Count Charles d’Ursel: DE BRIEY, Claude, “Souvenirs de Charles d’Ursel, zouave pontifical”, *Revue générale belge*, 1950, 778-796. For the relatives of Belgian diplomats in the papal army, see EPNB, 1984, 109; 1988, 137 and 229; 1993, 13; 2000, 16. See also DUMOULIN, *La carrière diplomatique*, 9-10 and Part II.

⁴⁴⁹ EPNB, 1999, 34; ADCB, 1930, 309.

⁴⁵⁰ VAN DEN STEEN DE JEHAY, Frédéric, “Les philosophes modernes et leur influence sociale”, *Le Magasin littéraire et scientifique*, 15 January 1886, 87-136 (especially 128-135).

advantages of the system. “Judging by the nice specimen the French people have sent to the Chamber,” he contemplated, “I do not really see the upside of this universal and ‘obligatory’ suffrage; I am curious to see what will come from it; the first results will be splendid; then the whole system will decay and collapse, like everything in this world.”⁴⁵¹

Despite his assuming a somewhat detached attitude, Van den Steen could not hide his unease with the reality that the working classes would send their ‘specimen’ to parliament. The entrance of the first socialists in the Chamber from late 1894 onwards, indeed caused what could be termed as a clash of political cultures. Most parliamentarians experienced the rhetoric and behaviour of the new MPs as severely infringing on parliamentary norms and values. Since parliament epitomized Belgian unity and had to ensure that the common good of the nation prevailed, parliamentary dignity depended upon the ability of its members to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue. Prior to the franchise extensions, the Chamber and the Senate drew heavily from aristocratic and upper bourgeois circles. Consequently, aristocratic and bourgeois mores and codes determined parliamentary etiquette, and new members were expected to observe convention. Socialists, however, did not consider themselves representatives of the whole nation, but only of the proletarian classes. Hence they did not care about parliamentary morals. Instead, they inspired their political style on the behaviour of the man in the street.⁴⁵²

Over the next decades, conservative parliamentarians witnessed many manifestations of this new political style, not least during the discussions, in 1899, about the introduction of a system of proportional representation at legislative elections. Hoping to end Catholic predominance over parliament and the government, a coalition of Liberals and Socialists wished to replace regulations that assigned all the seats in one constituency to the biggest party in that constituency. This would not only increase the resemblance between the electorate and its representation in parliament, but would also recognise the pluralism that existed within the political landscape and thus constitute a confirmation of the party system. While support for the proportional representation system ran across party lines, democrats

⁴⁵¹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon Van der Elst, 19 October 1893.

⁴⁵² DEFERME, Jo, “Van burgerlijke afstandelijkheid naar volkse betrokkenheid. De politieke cultuur van enkele socialistische mijnwerkers in het Belgisch parlement, 1894-1914”, *Brood en rozen: tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van sociale bewegingen*, 1, 2004, 11-29 (especially 11-15); BEYEN, Marnix and Rik RÖTTGER, “Het streven naar waardigheid: zelfbeelden en gedragscodes van de volksvertegenwoordigers”, in GERARD, *Geschiedenis van de Belgische Kamer*, 337-338.

within these parties generally favoured it the most.⁴⁵³ Discussions about the proposed reform eventually got out of hand after an effort by the Minister of Interior Affairs to channel the desire for proportional representation towards a partial application of this system that only benefited the Catholic majority. For several days, socialist delegates obstructed the workings of the Chamber, shouting, clattering with their desks, blowing whistles, and even throwing little balls of paper at the speakers. Mass protests in the streets of Brussels accompanied their actions in parliament, and led to the fall of the government. Not long after, the new government introduced the proportional representation system in all constituencies.⁴⁵⁴

Yet parliamentary and extra-parliamentary actions instigated by the Socialist Party did not end there. The twentieth century had just started when Radical Liberals and Socialists reinvigorated their campaigns for the establishment of unweighted universal male suffrage. However, the failure of these joint efforts contributed to their drifting apart. While the Liberal Party largely recovered its lost unity under the guidance of the young Paul Hymans, the socialist parliamentarians found themselves increasingly isolated and resorted to their well-tried methods of strikes and street protests. Spectators of such manifestations might have been struck by the personality cult its participants professed, as portraits of socialist leaders were carried through the streets of Belgium's major cities. The fruits of the field of domestic politics indeed increasingly fell to those who knew how to play to the masses.⁴⁵⁵

Kerchove did not consider himself fit for the politics of what he called "democracy or demagogy." Unfortunately for him, this was the wind that was blowing through all the parties. As the first decade of the twentieth century drew to its end, Christian democrats entered the Catholic government, while the doctrinal liberalism that his family had adhered to for generations had to give way to the more progressive liberal views of the political community. In 1912, the Liberal Party even formed an electoral cartel with the Socialists.⁴⁵⁶ Kerchove's realization that "I do not foresee that militant politics agrees with me" was confirmed by his wife, and might have convinced him to choose a profession and a way of life that suited him better. Although their ideological stance in matters of secularization differed greatly from Kerchove's, most ultramontane aristocrats certainly shared his aversion towards the democratization of the political system. While the majority of ultramontane Catholics came to support the politicisation of the masses from the early 1890s onwards, many aristocrats

⁴⁵³ DE SMAELE, Henk, "Politiek als hanengevecht of cerebraal systeem. Ideeën over politieke representatie en de invoering van de evenredige vertegenwoordiging in België (1899)", *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 114/3, 1999, 328-357.

⁴⁵⁴ DENECKERE, "1878-1905", 543-551.

⁴⁵⁵ DENECKERE, "1878-1905", 541 and 554.

⁴⁵⁶ DUMOULIN, "Het ontluiken van de twintigste eeuw", 774-777; WITTE, *Politieke geschiedenis*, 150.

among them continued to oppose the broadening of civic democracy. A considerable number of other aristocratic diplomats belonged to the latter group.⁴⁵⁷ Ever since the foundation of Belgium, the main political enemies of the ultramontane aristocracy within Belgian Catholicism were the so-called liberal-Catholics. During the ‘intermezzo’ of Catholic rule in the 1870s, these dominated the government and conducted a very moderate policy aimed at humouring the liberal opposition and the urban voters. However, this alienated them from the predominantly ultramontane countryside aristocracy. When Catholic politicians regained power in the mid-1880s, a short-lived opening towards the ultramontane aristocracy was followed by a resumption of this policy. At the same time, the liberal-Catholic political establishment granted a bigger forum to its democratic segments, which would gradually rise to power in the decade before the First World War.⁴⁵⁸

These developments certainly made the field of domestic politics less attractive to members of the highest Catholic aristocracy. By comparison, the world of diplomacy, which centred primarily around European courts and was pervaded with aristocratic manners and values, must have looked far more appealing. Of course, it would be all too simple to state that this explains why members of the old nobility turned progressively towards the diplomatic career as the long nineteenth century drew to an end. Yet the growing interest in joining the diplomatic corps of especially young men from the oldest and highest aristocratic families – and of those of the upper bourgeoisie that tried to emulate them –, cannot be ignored altogether. Between early 1884 and the spring of 1911, the social stratification of the Belgian diplomatic corps indeed underwent notable changes. While in 1884 less than one out of ten came from the oldest nobility and all of them were junior diplomats, in 1911 the relative share of these aristocrats had risen to one out of five and a quarter of them had obtained the ranks of minister.

Changes in the composition of the political elites on the mainland, and in the way they interacted with each other, do not suffice to explain the attraction of young men of great wealth and considerable social standing to Diplomatic Island. The accessibility, from the mid-1880s onwards, of a more attractive variety of activities on the island must be taken into account as well.

⁴⁵⁷ See also MARY, Michel, “Le Comte Gontran de Lichtervelde”, 62-66.

⁴⁵⁸ LAMBERTS, “Het ultramontanisme”, 50-54.

§ 3. A Greater Belgium

Colonialism and Democratization

The culture of superiority towards the world of politics that predominated in the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island from its creation not long after Belgium's independence was passed on from generation to generation. Commenting in his memoirs on the insufficiency of diplomatic salaries prior to the First World War, Pierre Orts with some sense of exaggeration, stressed that "no diplomat who painfully experienced its consequences, would have even thought of complaining about the thievery of the State." Quite the contrary, Orts continued, "we drew glory from being the only public functionaries who served for 'the honour of serving'." The chronological distance between memory and lived experience did allow Orts to acknowledge that "the awareness of this superiority had contributed to develop in those of 'the career' a certain self-satisfaction not lacking in conceit."⁴⁵⁹

As these comments suggest, the feeling of superiority prevalent among Belgian diplomats was not only directed towards politicians but towards the wider public as well. It was also rooted in the diplomats' belief that they were simply better patriots than most of their fellow countrymen. In the minds of some diplomats, this conviction could also lead to frustration. In an official report sent to Davignon in the spring of 1913, Albert Garnier Heldewier, minister resident in Sofia, wrote that "the rare times that Belgian patriotism reveals itself, it has its source in alcohol." The Political Director Baron de Gaiffier gently replied that although he was convinced that Garnier's comments about Belgian patriotism were caused by a slip of the pen, his report could not be classified in the Department's archives containing such contents. Moreover, the Political Director continued, "it did not seem possible to M. Davignon to have your report read by the King." Since all official diplomatic correspondence had to be brought to the King's attention, Gaiffier asked that Garnier would revise his report.⁴⁶⁰

While it is difficult to say how Albert would have reacted if faced with such comments, the thoughts they would have evoked in the King's predecessor would have been easier to grasp. In a way, Leopold II indeed held similar opinions about Belgian patriotism. To the second King of the Belgians, a large part of the blame for the Belgian lack of love for their country lay with partisan politics. In 1865, the King wrote in his diary that "I deplore the

⁴⁵⁹ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 5.

⁴⁶⁰ AMBZ, PF 122, "Albert Garnier Heldewier", Léon d'Ursel to Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, s.d. [April 1913]; Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy to Albert Garnier Heldewier, 9 April 1913.

blindness and stupidity of the parties”, and suggested as a solution “to throw a grand new idea in the middle of this furnace”, that is to “raise the question of national expansion.”⁴⁶¹ Leopold’s plan of imperial expansion as a means to bridge partisan divisions appeared to materialize when he acquired the Congo Free State in 1885. According to Rik Coolsaet, the King believed that the acquisition of a colony would also contribute to the identification of the nation with the dynasty, in the sense that the King would offer the Belgians an opportunity to prove that they, like the British, the French and the Dutch, were in fact an imperial people.⁴⁶² Vincent Viaene has specified that the main social function of Belgian imperialism was “to unify the elites of a deeply divided country confronted with the onrush of democratization.” In late nineteenth century Belgium, these elites were composed in a similar way as the Belgian diplomatic corps, namely of predominantly liberal industrialists on the one hand, and chiefly Catholic landed aristocrats on the other hand. This unification worked, so Viaene argues, because Leopold II’s imperialism appealed to “the atavistic instincts of the Belgians”, by which Viaene means the longing of the elites for the hierarchical society of times past. It worked so effectively because the most atavistic element of Belgium’s social structure, namely the King, was not only the apex of its social structure, but also the source of Belgian imperialism. Leopold II functioned, in a way like Kings had done for centuries during the Ancien Régime, as some kind of fountain of favours that sprayed ennoblements to bourgeois entrepreneurs, concessions and shares to aristocrats, and decorations to both.⁴⁶³

Among the first to internalize the creed of empire were the families of the oldest aristocracy. These noblemen might have been attracted by the polity of the Congo Free State, an absolute monarchy where the full legislative, executive, and juridical power resided in the King.⁴⁶⁴ Moreover, the vast territories of the Free State offered many possibilities to the landed nobility, and might have accommodated their ascriptive claim to authority. In some ways, political life in the King’s colony indeed was reminiscent of that in early modern societies.⁴⁶⁵

The aristocratic families which took an active interest in colonialism, were largely the same families that, in the decades before the First World War, provided Belgium with a considerable number of junior diplomats. I will present just a few examples. The family of

⁴⁶¹ Leopold II de Belgique quoted in VIAENE, Vincent, “King Leopold’s Imperialism”, 755.

⁴⁶² COOLSAET, *België*, 137-139 and 201-202.

⁴⁶³ VIAENE, “King Leopold’s Imperialism”, 742, 744-750, 760, and 770-774.

⁴⁶⁴ See in this regard the work by the contemporary Belgian Congo critic Alphonse Wauters: WAUTERS, Alphonse-Jules, *L’état indépendant du Congo: historique, géographie physique, ethnographie, situation économique, organisation politique*, Brussels, 1899, 421. On Wauters, see also the interesting pro-colonial biography of R. Cambier: CAMBIER, R., “WAUTERS (*Alphonse-Jules*)”, *BCB*, 2, 1951, 969-972.

⁴⁶⁵ COOLSAET, *België*, 150.

Philippe d'Oultremont, the young diplomat who was so closely tied to the Royal Palace, contributed considerably to ensuring the viability of the Congo Free State in its early days. Especially Philippe's uncle John, Leopold II's Grand Marshall, appears to have played a crucial role in attracting foreign investors, in thinking colonial projects through with the King, and finally in convincing Belgian capitalists and engineers to help make the colony profitable. According to his biographer, who probably manifested a slightly excessive predilection for dramatization, Leopold II was so touched by this commitment that he got up from his deathbed and expressed his gratitude towards d'Oultremont while in tears and on his knees.⁴⁶⁶

Also there was the young count Louis d'Ursel, who entered the Career in 1909 and came from a family much devoted to the King's colonial enterprise. Upon reaching the rank of minister plenipotentiary in 1895, his father Charles took unlimited leave and went on a mission to China as the diplomatic representative of the Congo's Sovereign.⁴⁶⁷ Louis's uncle Hippolyte, a parliamentarian who represented the Belgian government at the inauguration of the Congo railroad system in 1898, felt he had to resign from the Senate after the Belgian *reprise* of the Free State ten years later. The reason, he explained, lay in "the unjust suspicions expressed during the discussions about the take-over of the Congo and the colonial law, towards all those who have participated in the economic development of the Free State."⁴⁶⁸ The fact that his cousin Ernest, one of the Belgian aristocratic pioneers to the inlands of the Congo, died there of meningitis in 1892, aged only twenty-five years old, might have added to Hippolyte's frustration with the many criticisms the African regime of Leopold II had to endure.⁴⁶⁹

Count Gontran de Lichtervelde, a senior diplomat who also served as a member of the Superior Council of the Congo Free State, certainly imbued his sons with a sense of Belgian imperialist pride. While his youngest son Jacques served as a magistrate in the farthest corners

⁴⁶⁶ JADOT, Jules, "Oultremont (d') (Charles-Jean, dit John)", *BCB*, 4, 1955, 667-672. The commitment of count Adrien d'Oultremont, another uncle of Philippe's, was less conspicuous but probably just as sincere. He sat on different of the Free State's newly decreed organizing committees and consistently defended the King's policies while in parliament during the late 1880s. See VANDEPLAS, A., "Oultremont (d'), Adrien", *BCB*, 5, 1958, 661-664.

⁴⁶⁷ WILLEQUET, *Le Congo belge*, 34-35. See also D'URSEL, Charles, "Souvenirs d'une mission diplomatique en Chine", *Revue Nouvelle*, May 1950, 456-468.

⁴⁶⁸ BONNAERENS, R., "Ursel (d') (Graaf Hippolyte...)", *BCB*, 4, 1955, 895-896.

⁴⁶⁹ HUBAUT, P., "Ursel (d') (Ernest...)", *BCB*, 3, 1952, 866-870. Surely, Ernest d'Ursel ranked among many young aristocrats ready to embark upon a colonial adventure. Count Philippe de Lalaing, the youngest brother of the Belgian minister in London and an uncle to an aspiring diplomat who entered the career in late 1911, had served as an under-commissioner in Boma in the late 1880s. See LACROIX, A., "Lalaing (de) (Philippe...)", *BCB*, 3, 1952, 490-491. Prince Henry de Croy, a first cousin, once removed of Réginald, who would enter the diplomatic corps during the First World War, was a district commissioner in the early 1890s and undertook several expeditions through the inlands of the Congo. See SOHIER, J. and M. STORME, "Croy (de) (Henri)", *BCB*, 8, 1998, 57-60.

of the Congo Free State, his oldest son Baudouin combined his professional activities as a junior diplomat with writing publications and giving lectures to promote Leopold II's overseas projects.⁴⁷⁰

In these writings, Baudouin de Lichtervelde often fulminated against the party-political squabbles of Belgian parliamentarians, who, he claimed, jeopardized Belgium's interests. In 1905, the editors of the bulletin of the *Société d'études coloniales*, whose goal it was "to assist the King in his great African oeuvre", published an article that Lichtervelde junior wrote under the pseudonym Captain Baldwin, and in which he argued for the establishment of a Belgian maritime armed force.⁴⁷¹ Lichtervelde junior was indeed convinced that disposing of a national navy "would have greatly facilitated the task of Him [i.e. Leopold II] and of those who, with an admirable providence and an inexhaustible dedication, have become the champions of the country's expansion." According to Lichtervelde junior, Belgian diplomats had adroitly used their skills to obtain an empire for Belgium and to safeguard its interests afterwards, but the lack of naval power had forced them to let different occasions for further expansion pass by. He identified the opponents of Belgium's overseas empire as "those who remain indifferent to this new Belgium that creates itself outside of our narrow borders ... because it is not situated in any electoral constituency."⁴⁷²

There seems to exist an analogy between Lichtervelde junior's comments and Kerchove's frustration with "the bigoted and narrow ideas of our small country." To a certain extent, their antagonists were indeed the same. Apart from a few exceptions, the parliamentarians who had undermined the traditional Liberal and Catholic elite's power base after the 1893 franchise extensions were also the most militant opponents of Belgian imperialism. They more or less coincided with the Radical Liberal and Socialist factions in parliament. Doctrinaire liberals were largely in favour of overseas expansion, as were most delegates of the Catholic Party. The popularity of the Congo enterprise among Catholic politicians had a lot to do with the rising prominence of corporatist ideologies in both Christian Democracy and social conservative political Catholicism. As Vincent Viaene explains, both "sought to anchor democracy in traditional hierarchies of status and conceived

⁴⁷⁰ EPNB, 1992, 334-335; MARY, "Le comte Gontran", ; WILLEQUET, Jacques, "Lichtervelde (de) (Baudouin...)", *BCB*, 6, 1968, 657-658; DE LICHTERVELDE, Baudouin, "Lichtervelde (de) (Jacques...)", *BCB*, 4, 1955, 524-525. Apologetic works by Belgian diplomats include VAN DER STRATEN PONTHOZ, Carl, *La question coloniale et le Congo : conférence donnée le 11 mai 1897 au Cercle des nationaux indépendants de Bruxelles*, Brussels, 1897.

⁴⁷¹ BALDWIN, Captain [=Baudouin de Lichtervelde], "Leçon tirée de quelques événements récents", *Bulletin de la société belges d'études coloniales*, 12, 1905, 555-563.

⁴⁷² BALDWIN, "Leçon", 555-559.

of the nation as an organic community of estates held together by faith and by devotion to the monarch.” Such devotion to “Him”, as Lichtervelde junior respectfully named Leopold II, also revealed itself in doctrinaire liberal circles. The social ideology of paternalism, prevalent in conservative liberal milieus, went very well indeed with the image of the King as the father of a growing country.⁴⁷³ Surely, the King’s paternal role did not carry away unqualifiedly positive judgements in these circles. In his memoirs, Pierre Orts, a young diplomat from a doctrinaire liberal family, confessed that he loathed Leopold II for “the scandals of his private life”, which “hurt the people’s sentiments about family values.” At the same time, however, Orts deeply admired him as King of the Belgians for his “sense of grandeur” and his “confident view of the superior interests of the country.”⁴⁷⁴ By providing the country with a colony, Leopold II had ingeniously promoted these interests, Orts appeared to claim.

In the opinion of many doctrinaire liberals, “colonialism was to be an education ... in patriotism for Belgium’s many new full citizens after the extension of the franchise.”⁴⁷⁵ After his return in 1903 from Washington, where he had served as Belgium’s minister plenipotentiary, Baudouin de Lichtervelde’s father Gontran published a booklet on exploratory expeditions from ancient times to the present day. While this booklet did not mention the Belgian empire, it contained a concluding reflection that perfectly captures the stance of the liberal elites on imperialism. Lichtervelde senior was a Catholic, but one often accused of being a Liberal in disguise.⁴⁷⁶ Such confusion testifies to the unionist ideology still held by many Belgian diplomats. Lichtervelde senior argued that “colonisation opens new horizons where the modern thinker who has been able to cast off the Nessus’ shirt of radical dogmatism, learns how to fulfil the dream of a superior democracy where the natural equality of men does no longer stand for the erosion of the most civilised to the level of the least civilised, but, on the contrary, for the growing and continuous betterment of the workers’ faith that the colonial civilisation of transoceanic lands presents us with.”⁴⁷⁷

In the mid-1890s, mostly under the pseudonym of Philopator, or ‘father-loving’, which was probably a reference to both his patriotism and his devotion to the dynasty, Lichtervelde senior had polemicized in newspapers, magazines and other publications against the extensions of the franchise.⁴⁷⁸ In these writings, most of which he collected in a small book entitled *Libres propos d’un Belge*, Lichtervelde senior ascribed the popular masses

⁴⁷³ VIAENE, “King Leopold’s Imperialism”, 770-773.

⁴⁷⁴ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 15-16.

⁴⁷⁵ VIAENE, “King Leopold’s Imperialism”, 774.

⁴⁷⁶ MARY, “Le comte Gontran de Lichtervelde”, 62-69.

⁴⁷⁷ DE LICHTERVELDE, Gontran, *Les légendes de l’inconnu géographique*, Brussels, 1903, 81.

⁴⁷⁸ MARY, “Le comte Gontran de Lichtervelde”, 62-69.

characteristics like ignorance, selfishness, envy, ingratitude, and other qualities that – in his view – demonstrated their political immaturity.⁴⁷⁹ An essay that Lichtervelde senior wrote about kingship contains an interesting connexion between colonialism and democratization. Written eight years earlier, it reveals that the diplomat's perceptions had changed. Lichtervelde senior stated that “we hear the most childish and inept prejudices being raised when dealing with the donation to Belgium of a colony destined to serve as a market for its overproduction. Not knowing anything outside of our frontiers, ... our democrats do not understand or do not want to understand a long term policy. They do not admit sacrifices that do not immediately pay off... It is true that, by its essence, a purely democratic government has never been and will never be but a transitory ebullition, like a hurricane.”⁴⁸⁰

In the following decade, it might have dawned on Lichtervelde senior that the temporality of democratic government outlasted his expectations. Comparing the comments Lichtervelde senior made in the mid-1890s with those he expressed in 1903, it appears that he adapted to the situation. Seemingly, Leopold II's colonial projects and the ideology that surrounded them had gradually enabled him to come to terms with the challenges of modernism and democratization. In the eyes of Lichtervelde senior and many of his colleagues, the existence of the Congo Free State offered the possibility to channel the forces that the political democratization of Belgian society had set in motion.

Patriotism and Neutrality

Writing as Captain Baldwin in 1905, Gontran de Lichtervelde's son Baudouin felt that, despite the apparent political support of the parliamentary majority for Belgian imperialism, the superior interests of the country were still under threat. Lichtervelde junior felt this way because many of the politicians who supported the King's colonial oeuvre did not agree with his equation between militarization and colonialism. The young diplomat certainly knew that opposition towards the former had indeed a far larger political basis. In addition to most Radical Liberal and Socialist parliamentarians, who adhered to the principles of international pacifism, most Catholic politicians, too, had ideological reasons to disapprove of any measures that strengthened the state's military apparatus. A stronger army indeed was a larger army, and this meant that more Catholic souls would become exposed to the moral decay that life in the army barracks was believed to lead to. Furthermore, ever since the Franco-Prussian

⁴⁷⁹ PHILOPATOR, *Libres propos d'un Belge*, Brussels, 1895.

⁴⁸⁰ PHILOPATOR, *Libres propos*, 21-22.

war of 1870 had left the Belgian soil untouched, Catholic governments felt strengthened in their belief that a strict policy of neutrality would safeguard the country from future European wars. In 1904, this line of thought spurred the Catholic majority into declaring that the state of national defence was excellent.⁴⁸¹ Many other diplomats shared Lichtervelde junior's disappointment with this line of thought. Baron Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy claimed to feel very sad that the Catholic government had "contributed so strongly to accredit the opinion that the treaties offer safe shelter for our independence", and worried that "nowadays, the government fears that it is no longer able to master this current of opinion, gets carried away by it, and does not dare to propose any measure to which the masses would not agree."⁴⁸²

Like Gaiffier, Lichtervelde junior connected this attitude to the electoral calculations that the transformations of the political system over the previous decade had brought about. In a time when party politics dominated the political game and every vote counted to strengthen a party's power base, the fact that the masses cared very little for overseas expansion and were very suspicious of militarization, indeed presented a problem. Yet, Lichtervelde junior argued, a Belgian navy could remedy this lack of attachment to the expansionists' ideal of a greater Belgium: "One can note the fortunate influence of a State navy on the public mind. Every sailor will unconsciously propagate the ideas of expansion within his family, and will raise the interest of a whole group of relatives and friends in faraway things." Lichtervelde junior then addressed the Catholic government's determination to maintain Belgium's neutrality on the international scene. A state navy, he posited somewhat inconsistently, would fit in perfectly with an "active, fertile neutrality" that would allow Belgium "to eradicate the bad effects caused by our continuous abstention" in international affairs. "The most modern tendencies of international law", he assured, "are disposed to grant an ever larger place to the idea of strong, triumphant neutrality to the detriment of the idea of the timid neutrality that is ashamed of itself." In his conclusion, Lichtervelde junior fulminated against "the ignorance, the indifference, and unfortunately also the bad will of some" that would make the interests of the country suffer for a long time until "necessity makes law, silences all opposition and destroys all obstacles." If the politicians acted now, however, "the new Belgian State navy would not be laughed at for too long; it will rapidly constitute an élite, and bring honour to the country it represents."⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ GUBIN and NANDRIN, "Het liberale en burgerlijke België", 349; DUMOULIN, "Het ontluiken van de twintigste eeuw", 703-706.

⁴⁸² ARA, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst, n° 52, Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy to Léon van der Elst, 4 January 1909.

⁴⁸³ BALDWIN, "Leçon", 556-559 and 562-563.

Baudouin de Lichtervelde's article echoed many of the discourses held by his father ten years earlier in *Libre propos d'un Belge*. In this collection of essays, Gontran de Lichtervelde alternated reflections about Belgian colonialism with comments on "the military question". Quoting the words of Julius Cesar, Lichtervelde senior regretted that whereas the Belgians were once called the bravest of all Gauls, they had entirely lost their fighting spirit. During the Middle Ages, Lichtervelde senior continued – with an implicit reference to his family history –, 'Belgian' knights and commoners could still be seen "spilling their blood on all the European battlefields", but afterwards the Belgians seem to have gradually accepted "the apathetic somnolence of tributary nations." Advancing the interpretation of Belgian neutrality that his son would paraphrase in 1905, Lichtervelde senior stated that "one does not have to be an expert in international relations to see that Europe expects more from us than a platonic declaration of neutrality, that she wants and considers it to be her right to impose onto us a neutrality that, if need be, knows how to have itself respected, if events occurring at our borders would create the temptation to violate it."⁴⁸⁴ Surely, unlike his son did in his 1905 article, Lichtervelde senior was not explicitly referring to the military protection of Leopold II's colonial empire, but rather to the geopolitical position of Belgium within Europe. Yet the notion of active neutrality, striking in Lichtervelde senior's essay by its personification, as if it were something human, referred to both territories that Belgian diplomats considered to be their working ground.

From the negotiations that surrounded Baudouin de Lichtervelde's entry into the diplomatic career almost a decade earlier, we know that both father and son did not lack self-confidence. The foundation of the Congo Free State by Leopold II did nothing to diminish that sentiment. Leopold II's imperialism indeed increased the feeling of self-worth among Belgian diplomats. The Belgian King counted on them to defend the colony's position on the international scene. Moreover, defending the Congo's interests gave many diplomats the feeling that they were representing an important power with worldwide interests. The way they perceived their functions differed greatly from the way many older Belgian diplomats had perceived theirs from the late 1840s until the early 1880s, when they were mainly required to stay away from conflicts between Belgium's great European neighbours.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴ PHILOPATOR, *Libres propos*, 66-72.

⁴⁸⁵ VIAENE, "King Leopold's Imperialism", 770-774.

After the Belgian state took over the Congo in 1908, the colony's polity changed from an absolute monarchy to a structure that granted a larger place to parliamentary control.⁴⁸⁶ This did not seem to have influenced the attachment of diplomats of the highest aristocracy to the empire that Leopold II had bestowed upon Belgium. Neither did it weaken their militancy to protect and strengthen the realm. On a Thursday evening in March 1913, the senior diplomat Prince Pierre de Caraman Chimay entertained his audience at the Hotel Ravenstein in Brussels for more than two hours with a lecture entitled *Patriotisme et Patrie*.⁴⁸⁷ These were times when tensions between European countries were rising much higher than in the mid-1890s, when Lichtervelde senior had informed his readers about the international pressure on the Belgian government to show that it could defend its neutrality. In the years before the First World War, voices demanding that the state increased its military resounded much louder. In this context, the Belgian political landscape was divided over the question whether or not to replace the limited draft of one man per family by a general conscription. Combined efforts by the most convinced advocates of the wider recruitment system, namely King Albert and the Cabinet Chief Charles de Broqueville, would lead to the adoption of the general conscription law just before the summer of 1913.⁴⁸⁸

In the meantime, the Prince de Caraman had been giving lectures to support the King's view. On that Thursday in March, he will not have had to do much convincing, for he was addressing an audience invited by the *Société Belge d'Études Coloniales*. Starting from the question "Do we have to secure our national defence?", Caraman promised to explain why the answer could only be "Immediately".⁴⁸⁹ His discourse comprised many of the elements that constituted the vision of the proponents of the 'Greater Belgium' idea, but it also contained the seeds of future conflicts among Belgian diplomats and between some members of the Belgian diplomatic corps and some leading politicians. Let us listen to the message that the prince wished to convey to his receptive audience.

Caraman started his discourse by examining "the causes that have put our patriotism asleep." In addition to "race rivalries", by which he meant tensions between Belgium's two linguistic communities, and an excessive identification with their own village instead of with their country, he charged the Belgians with a general indifference towards foreign affairs and

⁴⁸⁶ VANTHEMSCHE, *Congo*, 38-39. For the impact of the *reprise* on Belgian society in 1908, see VIAENE, Vincent, "Reprise-remise. de Congolese identiteitscrisis van België rond 1908", in Vincent VIAENE, David VAN REYBROUCK, and Bambi Ceuppens (eds.), *Congo in België. Koloniale cultuur in de metropool*, Leuven, 2009, 43-62.

⁴⁸⁷ DE CARAMAN CHIMAY, Pierre, *Patriotisme et patrie*, Paris and Brussels, 1913.

⁴⁸⁸ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 167-174.

⁴⁸⁹ DE CARAMAN, *Patriotisme*, 7-10.

especially with having too much confidence in “the obligations of the Great Powers towards us”, that is in the guarantee of Belgian neutrality.⁴⁹⁰ For Caraman, patriotism thus implied not only taking the state as reference for the nation but also looking beyond the nation and actively contributing to uphold and strengthen the country’s position in the world.

To prove why such attitude was justified, Caraman wished to analyse the economic, political and social role that Belgium had played in the world since 1830. While he devoted, in very general terms, less than one minute to Belgian social justice, which might have revealed the importance he attached to it, Caraman went to great lengths to honour Belgium’s economic accomplishments. He stressed that “despite possessing only an intermediary portion of the Scheldt and Meuse basins, which nourish our territory”, the Belgians had very quickly completed “the three distinct phases that characterize the life of peoples” and that led to the country’s “industrial and commercial superiority.” These phases could be labelled as foreign investments in Belgium, autarchy, and Belgian investments in foreign lands.⁴⁹¹ Like Lichtervelde junior and senior, Caraman devoted considerable attention to economic expansion. Contrary to contemporary assumptions expressed in parliament and in the press, which associated both the highest aristocracy and Belgian diplomats with aversive attitudes towards issues of commerce and industry, those aristocratic diplomats who propagated ideas of national expansion fully embraced the economic dimension of this project.⁴⁹² It is telling in this regard that, in addition to the Commercial Director, the Foreign Ministry sent the young secretary Baron Henry De Woelmont, scion of a family whose nobility dated from the Middle Ages, as representative to the *Congrès international d’expansion économique mondiale*.⁴⁹³ The organizers of this conference, which took place in Mons at the end of September 1905, wished to launch the “great Belgian patriotic expansion movement”.⁴⁹⁴ Although several speakers at the Mons congress criticised the lack of interest in economic matters among Belgian diplomats, some held opposite opinions and glorified the diplomatic corps’ protection of Belgian commercial interests abroad.⁴⁹⁵ Most likely, these different opinions originated in encounters with different diplomats, for not all members of the diplomatic corps were equally concerned about the country’s economic affairs.

⁴⁹⁰ DE CARAMAN, *Patriotisme*, 10-25.

⁴⁹¹ DE CARAMAN, *Patriotisme*, 28-34.

⁴⁹² For these criticisms from parliamentarians and journalists, see Chapters 4 and 7.

⁴⁹³ *Congrès international d’expansion économique mondiale tenu à Mons du 24 au 28 septembre 1905 sous le haut patronage de Sa Majesté le roi Léopold II et du gouvernement belge. Document préliminaires et Compte rendu des séances*, Brussels, 1905, xxiv and xxv.

⁴⁹⁴ The quote is to be found in DUMOULIN, “Het ontluiken van de twintigste eeuw”, 731.

⁴⁹⁵ *Congrès international d’expansion*, 235-236, and 243-245.

Caraman's discussion of the third phase of the economic life of the Belgians took him smoothly to the political achievements of his compatriots. According to the prince, these could all be subsumed under the heading "Expansion". He qualified the acquisition of the Congo by the "genius" Leopold II as an "almost unreal [...] miracle" and as "a phenomenon of inestimable bearing". He also claimed to believe that it could change "the very physiognomy of our people." Convinced that "the air we breathe has widened and vivified", Caraman rhetorically asked whether "the great winds of the large sea, that are so heady, whose scent inebriates the young and incites them, en masse, to sublime sacrifices, are not already blowing through our smallest villages?"⁴⁹⁶

Actually, the right answer to this rhetorical question would be 'No'. The so-called 'colonial mind' was very much absent in the Belgians. Admittedly, the number of Caraman's compatriots who embarked for the Congo almost doubled between 1908 and 1913, but still remained well under four thousand. Among the white population of the colony, the relative share of Belgians hardly ever amounted to six out of ten. This was partly a consequence of the government's policy to discourage *poor whites* to go there; the men in charge preferred to colonize the Congo with the aid of elites. Yet Caraman was also right in affirming that the absence of the colonial mind had to do with the peculiar kind of patriotism that slumbered in the Belgian population. This mental disposition approached sentiments of affection for the country with a certain scepticism and harboured different, conflicting loyalties. Perhaps more importantly, Belgian colonialism was imposed on the nation by a King who, contrary to most of his subjects, did possess an imperial mind and who intelligently played the political parties off against each other to achieve his goals. Asking whether the "accolades for Leopold might have compensated the lack of 'colonial diligence' in the Belgian population", the Belgian historian Guy Vanthemsche grasped these considerations in an equally rhetorical question that sheds light on the one posited by Caraman, and also on the glorification of Leopold II expressed by the prince and by both Lichterveldes.⁴⁹⁷

More generally, before the First World War the whole expansionist movement to which part of the diplomatic corps seemed to swear allegiance, remained fairly small as to the number of its adherents. Nevertheless, this small group counted some of the most prominent people from finance and industry among its members. In an economically liberal state such as Belgium, it was not altogether surprising that this line of thinking quickly gained access to the

⁴⁹⁶ DE CARAMAN, *Patriotisme*, 28-39.

⁴⁹⁷ VANTHEMSCHE, *Congo*, 53-57. See also STANARD, Matthew G., *Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism*, Lincoln, 2011.

highest political circles. As the generous government patronage of the Mons Congress for global economic expansion revealed, this had happened before 1905. The congress had adopted many of the stances that Caraman and other diplomats defended.⁴⁹⁸ Referring to Belgium's military absence in the suppression of the Boxer Uprising five years earlier, one speaker regretted that "the well-known energy, talent, and devotion of our diplomatic corps are insufficient weapons ... for having themselves heard as clearly as those of their colleagues who could have a few cruisers supporting their claims." Like Lichtervelde junior, whose article in the *Bulletin de la Société Belge d'Études Coloniales* was published around the same time, this speaker fiercely reacted against the conviction of many of his fellow-countrymen "that the creation of a military marine in a neutral state would be the end of its neutrality."⁴⁹⁹

Remarkably enough, the Belgian expansionist ideology also found some of its staunchest supporters among the country's socialists. However, the socialist advocates of empire in question, the most well-known of whom were the formerly Liberal lawyer Edmond Picard and his collaborator Léon Hennebicq, belonged to a minority of right-wing socialists. In 1908, Picard would leave the party after controversies caused by his anti-Semitic and imperialist ideas.⁵⁰⁰

In the decade before the First World War, Hennebicq would grow out to become the theoretician of Belgian nationalism. Although this movement remained very small before the outbreak of war, it did group writers from different political denominations. Receiving support from Liberal journalists and publicists such as Louis Dumont-Wilden, Roland de Marès, and Maurice des Ombiaux, and at a later stage from young Catholic lawyers such as Pierre Nothomb, Hennebicq and his collaborators developed an ideology of Belgian nationalism which, apart from its advocacy of universal single male suffrage, contained nearly all elements of the discourses of expansionist diplomats. At the domestic level, nationalists fiercely criticized partisan politics for impeding the elevation of the masses to a national ideal. According to Hennebicq and his friends, this ideal would find its realisation primarily outside of Belgium's borders. Like Caraman and the Lichtervelde's, the nationalists greatly disliked Belgian neutrality. In their opinion, it emasculated a nation which needed to expand in a struggle with other nations. Hence their great admiration for Leopold II. The nationalists believed that the struggle between nations would primarily be fought in the economic sphere

⁴⁹⁸ DUMOULIN, "Het ontluiken van de twintigste eeuw", 705 and 731-732.

⁴⁹⁹ The speaker, Dr E. Valentin, was headmaster of a reputable high school in Brussels. See *Congrès international d'expansion*, 235-236.

⁵⁰⁰ COPPEIN, Bart, *Dromen van een nieuwe samenleving: intellectuele biografie van Edmond Picard*, Brussels, 2011, 270-305; VAN GINDERACHTER, Maarten, *Het rode vaderland. De vergeten geschiedenis van de communautaire spanningen in het Belgische socialisme voor WO I*, Tiel, 2005, 208-209 and 299.

yet did not exclude war as a legitimate means to increase the greatness and health of the nation. A further similarity with the ideas of the expansionist diplomats lies in the memory of the drama of 1839, when the Treaty of London stipulated that the Belgian government had to give up the Dutch territories it occupied since 1830, namely parts of the provinces of Zeeland, Limburg, and Luxemburg.⁵⁰¹ Caraman's subtle remark in 1913 that Belgium had flourished "despite possessing only an intermediary portion of the Scheldt and Meuse basins" was indeed a direct reference to what nationalists and expansionist diplomats alike perceived as a tragedy.⁵⁰² Hennebicq and his friends were more explicit in venting their disappointment. They labelled the "robberies" of the lost territories now as "a wound barely healed", and then as "injuries that had begun bleeding again."⁵⁰³

As these quotations illustrate, the resemblances between the discourses of nationalists and expansionist diplomats not only lay in their contents but more tangibly in the organic imagery that punctuated the ideas of both groups. Such commonalities would seem to suggest that there were possibilities for some kind of entente between aristocratic and high bourgeois diplomats and the forces of democratization, which the nationalists claimed to represent.

Generation Gap

While Caraman seemed to agree with Hennebicq that the Belgians constituted a nation in gestation, his analyses of the country's economic and political development also told him that Belgium had become a great power. From this conclusion, the prince deduced that "such a growth in strength would, by itself, have sufficed to change our mentality... and to attach ourselves more to our Fatherland." It was thus incomprehensible that "after having affirmed our virility in front of the whole world, we keep our eyes stubbornly fixated upon pieces of paper and treaties." Caraman indeed wondered whether "some of us have not thoughtlessly let themselves be hypnotized by this all too often repeated word 'neutrality', the magic word thanks to which we, while Europe is burning, would form, if they are to be believed, an inviolable oasis." Caraman claimed that he would "easily succeed" in proving them wrong, were it not that his diplomatic quality refrained him from doing so. He concluded this part of his lecture by expressing his conviction that "talking like this will not discredit me as hostile

⁵⁰¹ DEFOORT, Erik, "Het Belgische nationalisme voor de eerste wereldoorlog", *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis*, 4, 1972, 524-542.

⁵⁰² The Meuse river runs through Dutch Limburg, while Flemish Zeeland comprised the left bank of the Scheldt river.

⁵⁰³ DEFOORT, "Het Belgische nationalisme", 527-528.

towards diplomacy, which I have served with passion and to which I have the honour of belonging.”⁵⁰⁴

As Caraman’s comment suggests – and as we have seen in the previous chapter –, not all diplomats unconditionally embraced the expansionist ideology, for it endangered the more conservative conception of neutrality that they still clung to. This was the opinion of part of the older generation of Belgian diplomats who had risen to ministership under the guidance of the Political Director Léon Arendt and the doyen of the diplomatic corps Jules Greindl. According to Viaene, Leopold II’s “decisive role in the making or breaking of diplomatic careers” left these diplomats “little choice but to double as agents of the Congo State.” Viaene adds that forces in the diplomatic corps that opposed the King’s overseas empire also drained away because “by 1908, a new generation of diplomats — more aristocratic in its social composition and outlook — had internalized the imperial creed.”⁵⁰⁵ Although Viaene does not prove his point, in this chapter we have seen that he is right about the changing social stratification of the Belgian diplomatic corps between the mid-1880s and the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Viaene is also right that by the time Belgium took over the Congo in 1908, no Belgian diplomat would contest the country’s right to a colony or blame Leopold II for having acquired one.

Yet Viaene’s remark that a new generation of diplomats had internalized the imperial creed needs some further clarification. If anything, it harbours the idea of a conflict of the generations within the Belgian diplomatic corps. In his memoirs, Pierre Orts illustrated how in a younger generation of foreign policy executives, the concepts of imperialism and (anti-) neutrality were inextricably intertwined: “With a few ... young functionaries, we formed the ‘generation of the Congo’, the one that claimed that their horizons and preoccupations had been enlarged by the contact with the African oeuvre of Leopold II (after us there was the ‘generation of the war’). We felt very strongly that to preserve our recently acquired colonial domain, it was necessary to accept certain risks. The pusillanimity of our seniors irritated and perturbed us. It is from that epoch [*i.e. around 1905*] that stems my aversion for the regime of neutrality.”⁵⁰⁶ In 1898, Orts had received his first diplomatic assignment as an attaché in the Belgian legation in Paris, where he would stay for almost five years. The way he portrayed the head of that legation reveals much about how the younger generation of Belgian diplomats viewed their seniors. According to Orts, Baron Auguste d’Anethan “personified the

⁵⁰⁴ DE CARAMAN, *Patriotisme*, 39-41.

⁵⁰⁵ VIAENE, “King Leopold’s Imperialism”, 759.

⁵⁰⁶ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 22.

conventional type of the old school diplomat [...] Utterly circumspect in his conversations, he talked little and weighed his words as if his slightest verbal imprudence could have disturbed the repose of Europe. Never had a somewhat rude or merely forward term escaped from his lips. One was inclined to see in Baron d'Anethan some sort of survivor of the Congress of Vienna who would have felt offended by the rudeness that Metternich occasionally recurred to and by the bluntness of the remarks that Talleyrand indulged in, considering these as scandalous transgressions of proprieties. Baron d'Anethan was moulded to the conceptions that prevailed in Belgian official spheres as to the self-effacement that in international relations imposed itself upon neutral Belgium [...] This well-bred man found himself very uprooted in the French official world, where uneducated persons and impertinent politicians abounded. With that world he had only the inevitable contacts. He usually associated with a few old circle members, aristocrats and reactionaries, and with a handful of dowagers of the *Faubourg Saint Germain*. The minister of Belgium ignored the living France.”⁵⁰⁷

It is clear that Orts used the example of Baron d'Anethan to denounce an entire generation of Belgian diplomats. First he stressed that these diplomats had already been outdated for almost a century when they were sent abroad to defend Belgium's interests. By closely associating them with the policy they had to carry out, Orts then condemned neutrality as long superseded. In his opinion, neither the policy of Belgian diplomacy nor the character of those charged with implementing it suited the country's true interests. Yet he could conclude this section of his memoirs on a cheerful note. The junior diplomats at the Paris legation, among whom Orts distinguished Caraman and Count Léon d'Ursel, “might not all have been highflyers, but I found in them conscientious and sound servants of the State, who were ardently national in a time when in our country the patriotism slumbered.”⁵⁰⁸ From the expansionist's point of view, at least, a brighter future appeared to lay ahead when these men would become senior diplomats.

The American historian Jonathan Helmreich has put forth the view that Baron d'Anethan and the other predecessors of the Congo generation had formed a generation themselves, distinct from the first group of Belgian diplomats. “The replacement of the old revolutionaries by men of a new generation”, Helmreich argues, occurred roughly in the fifteen years before the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871. Afterwards, Jean-Baptiste Nothomb was the only one of the diplomats from Belgium's beginnings who remained in active service. Explaining why Belgian foreign policy executives did all they could to avoid

⁵⁰⁷ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 3-4.

⁵⁰⁸ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 4.

getting involved in the Franco-Prussian conflict while it could have gained them Luxemburg, one of the provinces that were ‘lost’ after the 1839 Treaty of London, Helmreich argues that in addition to changes on the domestic and European scenes, the “hotspurs” had been “mellowed by time” and the new generation of diplomats was much more imbued with the self-effacing diplomacy required by the country’s neutrality.⁵⁰⁹ The first ‘generation of hotspurs’, which apart from Nothomb also included his fellow-revolutionaries Sylvain van de Weyer and Firmin Rogier, had a lot in common with the third ‘generation of the Congo’. Contrary to the second ‘generation of neutrality’, they favoured a proactive stance in international relations that was inspired by what could be labelled as a positive geopolitical consciousness. The generation of hotspurs, or – to put it more respectfully – the generation of revolutionaries, strained themselves in the 1830s to obtain legitimate and full possession of Luxemburg, Dutch Limburg, and Flemish Zeeland, which belonged to the Netherlands but were occupied by the Belgian army.⁵¹⁰ The generation of the Congo had followed the lead of Leopold II and had found the greater Belgium beyond Europe. Yet the memory of the struggle that their grandfathers had lost in 1839 burned vividly in their minds. Caraman’s remark about the Scheldt and the Meuse indeed also referred the claim of the first generation of Belgian diplomats.

No strict chronological boundary can be drawn between the different generations of Belgian diplomats. If the first generation groups those in active service before 1848, when Belgium gained international recognition as a stable, neutral state, and considering that full diplomatic careers lasted between thirty-five and forty years, an artificial division between the generation of neutrality and the generation of the Congo would more or less coincide with the recognition of Leopold II’s colonial empire in 1885. This would mean that Caraman, who entered the service in late December 1884, was one of the first scions of this generation. Yet premature births were very common in this region of the Belgian diplomatic corps’ mental world. What can one say of Edouard de Grelle Rogier, who entered the diplomatic career in the early 1860s and whose services to the Congo Free State earned him a count’s title in the early 1890s? The fact that he adopted the name of his revolutionary maternal uncles Charles and Firmin, the former of which had been Belgium’s minister of foreign affairs and prime minister at various times between the 1830s and 1860s, is not only a sign of ancestral veneration but it also testifies to his allegiance to the principles of the first generation of

⁵⁰⁹ HELMREICH, Jonathan, *Belgium and Europe: a study in small power diplomacy*, Den Haag – Paris, 1976, 95-103.

⁵¹⁰ See COOLSAET, *België*, 63-72.

Belgian diplomats. Baron Paul Guillaume entered the diplomatic career in the early 1870s and contributed for many years to the establishment of Leopold II's colonial empire. As minister plenipotentiary decades later, he started taking an active interest in the occupied territories that Belgium had to give up in 1839. This resulted in his publication of a two-volume history of the river Scheldt since the independence of Belgium. It would have also resulted in a "patriotic" history of Belgian diplomacy in the 1830s, were it not that Foreign Minister Paul de Favereau explicitly forbade Guillaume from writing it as long as he was in the diplomatic corps.⁵¹¹ Clearly, Favereau grasped Guillaume's conception of patriotism, and might have feared that it endangered Belgian neutrality. The entry of Gontran de Lichtervelde in diplomacy only a few years after Guillaume, provides another example of the Congo generation's premature births. In his *Libre propos d'un Belge*, Lichtervelde senior identified himself as the antagonist of those "timorous diplomats" who saw in the Congo Free State nothing but "stumbling blocks for our neutrality."⁵¹²

By the time the First World War broke out, both Degrelle-Rogier and Lichtervelde senior had died, but Guillaume was still there, heading the Belgian legation in Paris. Yet the generation of neutrality counted several survivors as well. While these men could no longer count on Arendt and Greindl, who retired the one not long after the other in 1912, they found in Secretary-General Léon van der Elst a convinced supporter of Leopold II's colonial oeuvre who had gradually come to accept the precedence of neutrality over empire. According to Pierre Orts, Van der Elst had become imbued with the concern "not to upset any foreign government and did not like any vigour in the defence of our colonial interests either."⁵¹³

In a way, similar developments manifested themselves in the diplomatic corps of the leading European states. Studying four age groups of German diplomats which consecutively rose to power between 1871 and 1914, Sönke Neitzel perceives a gradual paradigm change in the dominant ideas about international relations. While the earliest generation was sceptical about the benefits colonialism and imperialism, a later group of German diplomats embraced colonial politics as a means to enhance the national prestige. The group of diplomats which came to occupy key positions in the 1890s tended to combine imperialism with ideas about the 'natural' struggle between nations. According to Neitzel, "social-darwinism, racial theories, and hypernationalism" only intensified in the youngest group of diplomats. Adding a comparative perspective, Neitzel argues that in the British and Austro-Hungarian diplomatic

⁵¹¹ AMBZ, PF 143/399, "Paul Guillaume", Paul Guillaume to Paul de Favereau, September 1903; Note of Direction P; September 1903; See also GUILLAUME, Paul, *L'Escaut depuis 1830*, Brussels, 1902.

⁵¹² PHILOPATOR, *Libres propos*, 22.

⁵¹³ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 21.

corps nationalist ideas only gained predominance after the turn of the century, respectively from 1905 onwards and on the eve of the First World War.⁵¹⁴ Neitzel's assertion that such "irrational images of self and the other" pervaded all the different generations of French diplomats and Foreign Ministry officials active between 1871 and 1914, is partly contradicted by Peter Jackson and John Keiger. Whereas Jackson shows that in the decade before the First World War French senior diplomats abroad felt threatened by the Ministry's more junior officials, who in 1907 managed to push through far-reaching internal reforms, Keiger explains that the resulting tensions between both groups originated in the divide between the nationalist outlook of the junior officials and the more sanguine, pragmatic outlook of the senior diplomats.⁵¹⁵

Although one could easily place Baron d'Anethan, defender of the 'rational' and pragmatic policy of neutrality, at the beginning of the chronological spectrum, his reluctant secretary Pierre Orts, advocate of more 'irrational' and nationalist foreign policy ideas, towards the end, and the other aforementioned Belgian diplomats somewhere in between, the essential difference with the German, British, Austro-Hungarian, and French cases is that before the outbreak of war neutrality remained the predominant paradigm in Belgian foreign policy making. The nationalists among Belgian diplomats and Foreign Ministry officials would only manage to seize power during the war.

In his reflections about colonialism and diplomacy, Viaene remarks that "the imperial factor was [...] a key unspoken assumption behind the abandonment of neutrality after the First World War and the pursuit of a more active involvement in Great Power politics."⁵¹⁶ Although Viaene is right, it should be stressed that this abandonment of neutrality did not happen without a struggle. While most junior diplomats were ready to abandon neutrality even before the First World War had broken out, neutrality was the creed that some senior diplomats had so internalized that they felt the need to keep defending it throughout the First World War. This struggle, which involved not only the diplomatic corps but also Belgian politicians and journalists, will be dealt with in chapters six to nine.

⁵¹⁴ NEITZEL, Sönke, "Diplomatie der Generationen? Kollektivbiographische Perspektiven auf die Internationalen Beziehungen, 1871–1914", 296/1, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 2013, 91-106.

⁵¹⁵ JACKSON, Peter, "Tradition and Adaptation: The Social Universe of the French Foreign Ministry in the Era of the First World War", *French History*, 24/2, 2010, 180; John Keiger quoted in JACKSON, "Tradition and Adaptation", 180-181. See also KEIGER, John, "Patriotism, politics and policy in the Foreign Ministry, 1880–1914", in R. TOMBS (ed.), *Nationhood and Nationalism in France*, London, 1991, 258-259.

⁵¹⁶ VIAENE, "King Leopold's Imperialism", 759.

In the decades before the First World War, a variety of reasons attracted young men of great wealth and high birth towards Diplomatic Island: one could meet many interesting people, and the island abounded in honours and other means to enhance one's prestige. But transformations of society on the mainland also drove these young men to that island. On the mainland, their social importance was eroding in a society that was becoming more and more egalitarian. On the island, by contrast, they could reaffirm their claim to authority as defenders of an overseas empire. However, the forces of democratization operating on the mainland would not stay on the mainland. As yet, the tide was still too strong to let them reach the shores of Diplomatic Island, but ships with privateering politicians and publicists were already sailing the ocean. Soon a big storm would conduct them to the island.

Yet one wonders if some politicians would not have realized that Diplomatic Island was hard to govern without some support from its long-time residents, especially since these politicians would likely not agree amongst themselves what kind of polity the island needed. Conversely, it would not come as too big of a surprise if some of the junior inhabitants of the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island would not consider the arrival of democratic politicians with unqualified suspicion. Prior encounters might have indeed made them aware of the opportunities that the presence of these conquerors created for their social mobility and for the realization of their agendas, especially since they felt curtailed in their freedom of action by the senior inhabitants of the Belgian resort.

PART II **SILENCE BEFORE THE STORM? PUBLIC OPINION ON THE DIPLOMATIC** **CORPS BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR.**

In his 1935 column on diplomacy and diplomats, Henri Davignon asserted that in Belgium prior to the First World War, “diplomats were practically ignored. What did they do? How were they recruited? What was their use? All questions that were not asked.”⁵¹⁷ Davignon’s statements did not differ from those uttered by commentators on Belgian diplomacy immediately after the war.⁵¹⁸ Neither did they vary much from the opinions of historians writing almost half a century later. Asked to do a talk about domestic public opinion on Belgian foreign policy before the First World War, Jean Stengers responded that “this would certainly result in a very meagre presentation, because it was almost a non-topic.” Studying the correlation between public opinion and foreign policy in a given country presupposes that this country has a foreign policy, he argued. And since the Treaty of London, signed in 1839 by the European great powers, required Belgium to remain perpetually neutral, it did not have one.⁵¹⁹ Surely, the main purpose of Stengers’ intro was to provoke, and he did – slightly – nuance his claim afterwards. Yet both he and Davignon did not seem to wonder that taxpayers of a country with no foreign policy, might not have agreed to grant large amounts of money to persons who were supposed to carry out something that did not exist.

Stengers and Davignon were indeed bending the truth a little too far, and their vision needs to be readdressed. Admittedly, in parliament foreign policy issues were discussed almost exclusively during annual discussions of the budget for foreign affairs and debates about the foreign budget never took more than a few sessions. This applied to discussions about foreign budgets in the parliaments of Belgium’s neighbours as well.⁵²⁰ As such, a case

⁵¹⁷ DAVIGNON, “Diplomatie”, 505.

⁵¹⁸ See for instance DE RYCKMAN DE BETZ, Fernand, “La diplomatie belge. I. Avant la guerre”, *Revue belge*, I, 1918, 199; DESTRIÉE, Jules, “Notre diplomatie”, *Le Soir*, 26 July 1919.

⁵¹⁹ STENGERS, Jean, “Le cas de la Belgique”, in *Opinion publique et politique extérieure I, 1870-1915. Colloque organisé par l’Ecole française de Rome et le Centro per gli studi di politica estera e opinione pubblica de l’Università de Milan, Rome, 13-16 février 1980*, Rome, 1981, 29. The Treaty of London, signed in 1839 by representatives of the United Kingdom, Austria, France, Prussia, Russia, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, *de iure* recognized and guaranteed the independence and neutrality of the Kingdom of Belgium, which had gained *de facto* independence after the Belgian Revolution nine years earlier. See COOLSAET, *België*, 19-72.

⁵²⁰ Between 1895 and 1914, annual foreign budget debates in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives and Senate were held in one or two sessions, including the voting procedure, and witnessed little over a dozen politicians mounting the platform, including the budget reporter and the Foreign Minister. See <http://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/showpage.cfm?section=/cricra&language=nl&cfm=cricragen.cfm>; and http://www.senate.be/www/?MIval=/index_senate&MENUID=24400&LANG=nl. For the British parliamentary debates, see <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>. See also STEINER, *The Foreign Office*, 193. For the German

could be made for the general lack of interest in international relations by the majority of European parliamentarians. This might have sprung at least partly from their impotence to influence foreign policy making and diplomatic personnel policies, while processes of democratization also increasingly compelled the concern of parliamentarians for domestic issues. Yet analyses of the Belgian foreign budget debates also reveal that in the decades before 1914, these discussions nearly always gave rise to sometimes strong criticisms from politicians of different denominations, who were dissatisfied with the ways Belgian diplomats carried out the country's foreign policy. At the same time, Belgian diplomats regularly figured in polemical articles published in Belgian newspapers, whose journalists sometimes directed harsh reproaches towards them. This part studies these developments and investigates how diplomats perceived and reacted to them.

parliamentary debates, see <http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/index.html>. For the Dutch parliamentary debates, see www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl.

CHAPTER 4. DANCING IN THE DARK. PARLIAMENTARY ATTACKS ON BELGIAN DIPLOMATS AND DIPLOMACY BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

During the discussion of the budget for Foreign Affairs in July 1895, the socialist leader Edouard Anseele asked the question that, according to Davignon, no one thought about: “What do our diplomats do?” Anseele also claimed to know the answer to this question: “Playing baccarat with the viscount of Ne’er-do-well or dancing the cancan with the marquise of Wanton.” Since he was convinced that “we have enough diners and dancers over here”, Anseele proposed “to abolish our foreign legion of diners and dancers.” The socialist MP found diplomats to be superfluous in times of parliamentary government, public debate and well-informed newspapers. For Anseele, “today it is the people itself that, through its parliament, decides about peace and war.” As a neutral country, he continued, Belgium benefited even less from well-dressed diplomats who paraded in salons with feathers on their hats and well-lined purses in their hands. According to Anseele, diplomats should devote their time to exploring new markets for Belgian products. Or better yet, he suggested, why not replace all diplomats with consuls? At least they worked for the taxpayer’s money. Diplomats, by contrast, only spent it, while factory workers and peasants worked their fingers to the bone for pittance. However, Anseele wanted to be obliging, so the heads of mission in the countries that guaranteed Belgian neutrality could remain at their posts, provided that their remunerations were more than halved. To this end, the socialist leader made an amendment. He concluded his intervention by drawing a bead on the elevated aristocratic presence within the diplomatic corps, proposing that “instead of always choosing noblemen, we should recruit young people from all classes of society, especially those coming from industrial and commercial backgrounds.”⁵²¹

Never before had a parliamentarian so brutally criticized the Belgian diplomatic corps. Many MPs, including more progressive ones, felt highly indignant about Anseele’s comments. The Christian democrat Louis Théodor argued in the diplomats’ favour that they did properly defend the country’s economic interests and that their careers impoverished rather than enriched them. Anseele immediately reproached him with undemocratic behaviour. Rather than denying this, Théodor objected that, in this case, justice overcame democracy. Anseele, he argued, had been unjust and ungrateful towards Belgian diplomats. Others did not entirely disagree with Anseele, but stated that the tone of the socialist delegate

⁵²¹ PHK, 5 July 1895, 2027-2028 and 2083-2084. The quotes are on pp. 2027 and 2084.

alone sufficed for not supporting his proposition. Most delegates, however, did not deign to answer such boldness.⁵²²

This anecdote adequately illustrates the clash of political cultures caused by the democratization of voting rights in 1893. Most parliamentarians experienced the rhetoric of the socialists, who ended up in the Chamber of Representatives and in the Senate from late 1894 onwards, as severely infringing on parliamentary norms and values. The commotion stirred up by Anseele's discourse seemingly led Gustave Defnet, one of his fellow party members, to feel that he had to soften up his conservative colleagues a little. Diplomats surely did not dance the cancan with licentious noblewomen, he conceded, they directed the cotillion. Anseele, he continued, had merely been voicing the opinion of the masses, or did the honourable members really believe that "workers do not compare their misfortune with the fabulous salaries that you pay diplomats"?⁵²³

To Anseele and to other socialist delegates, who would often refer to his words in subsequent sessions of the Chamber and the Senate, diplomats were useless because of their aversion to economic affairs, grossly overpaid compared to the wages of workers, elitist on the basis of their social backgrounds, and offensive for their idleness and debauchery.⁵²⁴ The phrasing of his message shocked many observers, but was its contents all that new? The first section of this chapter, which studies parliamentary criticisms of the role of Belgian diplomats, starts by arguing that socialists' ideas about diplomats did not constitute a break from opinions expressed in prior parliamentary debates. It then looks more closely at the 1895 foreign budget debates, and scrutinizes how parliamentary ideas about diplomats evolved in the light of the approaching war. Anseele, and many of his colleagues, did not only criticize Belgian diplomats, but also condemned the secretive ways of Belgian diplomacy. The second section of this chapter will deal with parliamentary pleas for a more open and 'democratic' diplomacy. Both sections will take into account the Foreign Ministry's reactions to these attacks from parliament.

⁵²² Ibid., 2078-2079.

⁵²³ PHK, 5 July 1895, 2075-2076.

⁵²⁴ See also PHK, 22 February 1899, 666; id., 1 March 1900, 596; id., 9 April 1902, 1077-1078; id., 22 March 1907, 870.

§1. Diners and Dancers

Discouraging Diplomacy

Prior parliamentary debates about the budget for Foreign Affairs illustrate how Anseele's comments on the aristocratic character of the diplomatic corps conflict with the ones about diplomats' salaries. The principle introduced by liberal revolutionaries in the early 1830s, that the most competent citizens would be enabled to hold diplomatic positions regardless of their private fortune and social backgrounds, was abandoned rather quickly as opposition towards spending money on diplomats grew stronger and stronger throughout the first decades of Belgian independence.⁵²⁵ While in 1839, one parliamentarian cautiously suggested that "this expensive luxury was useless" to a politically neutral state, in the 1860s some MPs felt confident enough to draw from this point of view an even more radical opinion than Anseele had done, namely to assign Belgium's prestigious legations in London and Paris to old consuls who no longer supported climates in faraway lands.⁵²⁶

In the meantime, ties between the political and diplomatic establishments had weakened, which rendered pleas to broaden the access to the diplomatic corps less effective. Mutual incomprehension between diplomats and parliamentarians indeed only increased. After the Chamber of Representatives voted a reduction of the diplomats' salaries in October 1848, Emile de Meester de Ravesteijn, first secretary at the Belgian legation in Rome, complained that "members of our Chamber seem to have made it their duty to discourage our diplomacy."⁵²⁷

The budgetary difficulties incited the Foreign Minister to reduce the number of legations from eighteen in 1848 to thirteen in 1850 and to relieve a considerable number of less substantial diplomats from the service. Eugène de Kerckhove, at that time first secretary at the Belgian legation in Constantinople, reacted bitterly: "I have been sacrificed, not in the interest of the fatherland, but in the interest of a new organisation that favours a few men that

⁵²⁵ Some of these liberal revolutionaries, several of which had occupied diplomatic postings despite their lack of fortune, would continue to defend this principle, albeit ever more sporadically and ever less successfully. See for instance Joseph Lebeau's intervention in PHK, 23 December 1858, 315-317. Lebeau had been forced to abandon his diplomatic posting in Frankfurt because he could not afford it. Other examples of liberal revolutionary diplomats include Firmin Rogier, Sylvain Van de Weyer, and Jean-Baptiste Nothomb. For over thirty years, these men held Belgium's most important diplomatic postings of Paris, London and Berlin. For Lebeau, see FRESON, Armand, *Joseph Lebeau*, *BN*, 11, 1891, 503-517. For Rogier, see DISCAILLES, Ernest, *Un diplomate belge à Paris de 1830 à 1864*, Brussels, 1908. For Van de Weyer, see D'HOKER, Marc and Luc FRANCOIS, "Sylvain van de Weyer", in Reginald DE SCHRYVER, et. al. (eds.), *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, Tielt, 1998, 3727-3728. For Nothomb, see Jacques RUZETTE, *J.-B. Nothomb*, Brussels, 1946.

⁵²⁶ PHK, 17 December 1839 (<http://www.unionisme.be/ch18391217.htm#defoere1>); PHK, 20 April 1869, 735.

⁵²⁷ AMBZ, PF 216, "Emile de Meester de Ravesteijn", Emile de Meester de Ravesteijn to Constant d'Hoffschmidt, 8 May 1848. I am grateful to Gerrit Verhoeven for providing me with this reference.

are in a better situation than I am [...] The country will lose because of this system of excessive austerity; and, indeed, the inevitable consequence of the system, is the exclusion from the diplomatic corps of all who do not possess wealth. From now on, the career is closed to the industrious and intelligent youth who do not belong to any type of aristocracy, if it is not that of the mind [...] To attract this class, it would have taken serious admission requirements, guaranteed and strictly regulated advancement, and sufficient remuneration. That would have been to democratise diplomacy, that is to harmonize it with what is demanded by the general interest of the country, the spirit of our institutions, and the tendencies of our age.”⁵²⁸

Almost two decades after leaving the Belgian diplomatic career, Kerckhove ended up in the Chamber of Representatives, where he reiterated his claim that Belgian democratic traditions were incompatible with the elitist character of the diplomatic career, and suggested that the government would raise diplomatic salaries in order to enable educated men of every social background to serve the country in diplomacy. His request was simply ignored.⁵²⁹ In 1883, a similar fate befell another former diplomat when he denounced that young secretaries and advisors dropped out of the career because of the elevated expenses that it entailed.⁵³⁰

Léon d’Andrimont and Economic Diplomacy

The path towards increasing the salaries had to pass by initiatives to further the diplomats’ economic expertise first. The diligence of the liberal industrialist Léon d’Andrimont proved to be decisive in this respect. Much to his frustration, most of his proposals only materialized after he had left the Chamber in 1894. Nevertheless, they did pave the way towards the professionalization of the diplomatic career in an age when very few parliamentarians seemed to care.⁵³¹ D’Andrimont entered parliament in the late 1870s. At that time, Belgium was rapidly industrializing but its economic growth was threatened by protectionist policies in neighbouring countries. The Belgian business community knew that new markets were needed to keep expanding.⁵³² It could count on d’Andrimont to plead its case in parliament. Appalled by the paucity and inferior quality of young diplomats’ reporting on commercial matters, d’Andrimont initially backed earlier criticisms on the utility of the Belgian

⁵²⁸ Eugène de Kerckhove quoted in DELSEMME, *Contribution*, 171-172; AR, 1848, 25.

⁵²⁹ PHK, 20 April 1869, 739.

⁵³⁰ PHK, 17 April 1883, 835-836.

⁵³¹ PHK, 18 April 1902, 254-255. For d’Andrimont, see YANS, M., ‘D’Andrimont – De Moffarts, Victor Léon’, *BN*, 31, 1962, 25-26; DE PAEPE, Jean-Luc, and Christiane RAINDORF-GÉRARD (eds), *Le Parlement Belge 1831-1894. Données Biographiques*, Brussels, 1996, 87-88.

⁵³² COOLSAET, *België en zijn buitenlandse politiek*, 137.

diplomatic corps and besought for the replacement of diplomats by consuls.⁵³³ However, he soon realized that more could be obtained by a reorganization of the diplomatic career's admittance policy.

His first bone of contention was the requirement of a mere two-year university degree in Letters and Philosophy. D'Andrimont tried to restrict access to the diplomatic career to holders of a five-year university law degree. While his efforts would abort, regulations did come to stipulate, from 1897 onwards, that aspiring diplomats needed to have successfully completed at least four years of university studies.⁵³⁴ D'Andrimont also took offence at what he saw as the arbitrary selection of successful candidates by the examinations committee. Given that half of this jury was composed of parliamentarians, his accusation of favouritism provoked considerable indignation.⁵³⁵ D'Andrimont would have wished to see the diplomatic exam, which gave access to the rank of second legation secretary, transformed into a competition that stressed economic and linguistic proficiency. In this way, only the most competent candidates could pursue the diplomatic career.⁵³⁶ D'Andrimont, however, was aiming at the wrong target, as candidates for the diplomatic exam were subjected to favouritism and arbitrariness long before they appeared before the jury. Indeed, only legation attachés could present themselves at the exam, and naming them remained the prerogative of the King and the Foreign Minister.

In 1888, the Foreign Ministry seemed to succumb to the continuing criticisms from d'Andrimont, and Belgian exporters in general. It introduced a commercial exam for the rank of first secretary, and had candidates temporarily attached to the ministry's foreign trade section. However, the newly created test merely consisted in material extracted from the diplomatic exam.⁵³⁷ D'Andrimont was not amused. In the following years, he repeated that Belgian foreign trade interests would only really benefit from young diplomats doing internships at Belgium's major enterprises and taking practical exams about what they had learned there. Nothing ever came of this, but the ministry's continuing rejection of his proposals did incite d'Andrimont to pick up an older, but still controversial idea, namely the fusion of the diplomatic and consular careers. He apparently touched the right chord. Several speakers in Chamber and Senate now explicitly supported this proposal, and a contented

⁵³³ PHK, 7 February 1884, 433-434; id., 6 February 1885, 508-509; id., 16 February 1886, 578-579; id., 27 January 1887, 399-401.

⁵³⁴ Id., 27 januari 1887, 400 ; id., 30 januari 1889, pp. 399-401; ROOSENS, 'Agents diplomatiques belges', 109 en 116-118 ; DELSEMME, 'Quelques aspects sociaux de la carrière diplomatique', 14; *Pasinomie*, 1914, 331.

⁵³⁵ PHK, 28 January 1887, 412-415; id., 1 February 1887, 419-420.

⁵³⁶ Id., 6 February 1885, 508-509; id., 16 February 1886, 578-579; id., 28 January 1887, 412.

⁵³⁷ ROOSENS, 'Agents diplomatiques belges', 122-125.

d'Andrimont found that he would not have to go it alone any more. More importantly, the Foreign Ministry would soon no longer be able to dismiss "such a fusion" as mere "confusion", like it had done before.⁵³⁸

The Belgian consular career as a regulated, hierarchically organized and remunerated profession came into being only in 1896. Before, the Belgian Foreign Ministry was represented by a small number of paid consuls and a far larger number of honorary consuls, who were often natives of their resident countries. In 1901, approximately one out of ten consuls versus almost seven out of ten diplomats had noble status.⁵³⁹ A fusion of both careers would thus have provided the foreign service with a more democratic outlook.

D'Andrimont had always been aware that there existed a link between the social backgrounds of diplomats and their lack of interest in commercial matters, and that the democratization of the diplomatic career would thus go hand in hand with the diplomats' rising competence in economic diplomacy.⁵⁴⁰ He had repeatedly urged the Foreign Minister to reduce the number of junior diplomats and to increase the salaries of the remaining ones. He had also strongly opposed shrinking the salaries of senior diplomats. The government, he reasoned, would always find a rich man to occupy a prestigious post for less money, which would create one class of rich and likely incompetent diplomats, and another one of poor diplomats.⁵⁴¹ However, as his paternalistic and moralizing books about workers' organizations unmistakably demonstrate, d'Andrimont was a conservative liberal rather than a democrat.⁵⁴² His main concern remained to increase the diplomats' economic skills. He nevertheless realized that to gain greater support for his proposals, it might have been wise to highlight their democratizing effects. In February 1894, he declared: "I say that the diplomatic career is too aristocratic and needs to be democratized. It is necessary to enable young people who wish to devote themselves to this career, to live honourably."⁵⁴³

⁵³⁸ PHK, 19 January 1888, 388-389; id., 29 januari 1889, 391-392; 30 januari 1889, 399-401; id., 4 februari 1890, 527-529 en 535; id., 21 januari 1891, 281-282; id., 11 maart 1892, 781-782; PHS, 21 december 1892, 79. The quotes are in PHK, 17 April 1869, 734.

⁵³⁹ ROOSENS, *Agents diplomatiques belges*, 47-74. In 1901, only 6 out of 55 members of the Belgian consular corps were of noble descent, while 49 out of 76 diplomats had noble status. See ADCB, 1901, 129-135 and 127-130; and EPNB.

⁵⁴⁰ See DELCORDE, *Les diplomates belges*, 20.

⁵⁴¹ PHK, 7 February 1884, 433; id., 6 February 1885, 509; id., 27 January 1887, 400; id., 30 January 1889, 401.

⁵⁴² See D'ANDRIMONT, Léon, *Institutions et associations ouvrières de Belgique*, Brussels, 1871; and ID., *La coopération ouvrière en Belgique*, Liège, 1876. See also DEFOORT, Hendrik, *Werklieden bemint uw profijt!: de Belgische sociaaldemocratie in Europa*, Tiel, 2006, 70-75.

⁵⁴³ PHK, 14 February 1894, 562.

Only once, ten years earlier, had d'Andrimont employed the discourse of democracy to strengthen his arguments. Back then, nobody reacted.⁵⁴⁴ But now, just months after the introduction of the plural male suffrage, things had changed. Within the Liberal Party, progressives were rapidly gaining ground. After the 1894 election, they would occupy all remaining party seats in the Chamber of Representatives.⁵⁴⁵ Several Radical Liberals responded favourably to some of d'Andrimont's ideas. One of them argued that because Belgian diplomats almost exclusively belonged to noble and wealthy families, they conceived the diplomatic career as a way to lead an aristocratic life abroad, and that therefore all they did was "to parade in the salons".⁵⁴⁶ Radical Liberals concurred with d'Andrimont that diplomatic postings needed to be reserved for candidates who were well versed in economics, and they also strove to merge the diplomatic and consular careers. Yet contrary to d'Andrimont, they opposed any increase and even a status quo of diplomatic salaries. Given that, as they believed, Belgian diplomats considered economic diplomacy beneath their dignity and "only occupied themselves with dinners, balls, soirees and suppers", a reduction of diplomatic salaries was the only logical conclusion.⁵⁴⁷ As such, the Radical Liberals expressed the contradiction between their demand to broaden the access to the diplomatic corps, and their refusal to increase diplomats' salaries.

The 1895 Foreign Budget Debate

In other words, the contents of Anseele's discourse were hardly original. However, looking more closely at the discussions and their participants, the foreign budget debates of 1895 have been revealing in several ways. For the first time, parliamentarians of all three denominations that would dominate the Belgian political landscape for the next four decades, urged for a more democratic diplomatic representation. Motives to widen the access to the diplomatic corps indeed ran across party lines. Three of these reasons emerged from this debate.

From the opposition seats in the Chamber, the liberal journalist Georges Lorand agreed with Anseele that the diplomatic career could no longer be the privilege of the rich and noble, while in the Senate Anseele could have heard his discourse restated by fellow party

⁵⁴⁴ PHK, 6 February 1885, 509.

⁵⁴⁵ LEFÈVRE, Patrick, "De liberale partij als organisatie van 1846 tot 1914", in: Adriaan VERHULST en Hervé HASQUIN (eds.), *Het liberalisme in België. Tweehonderd jaar geschiedenis*, Brussels, 1989, 80-81. For an overview of factions and differences of opinion within the Liberal Party in these days, see GAUBLomme, Doreen, "Doctrinair en liberalen tijdens de 19e eeuw", in: Id., 201-208.

⁵⁴⁶ PHK, 20 February 1894, 641.

⁵⁴⁷ PHK, 21 February 1894, 654-655; id., 22 February 1894, 666-668.

members of both himself and Lorand.⁵⁴⁸ Like socialists, Radical Liberals found diplomats to be useless, expensive, elitist and offensive. Considering the ideological affinities and personal networks that both groups had shared for decades, the striking similarities between their discourses – they were even caught in the same contradiction – did not come without notice.⁵⁴⁹ The *Journal de Bruxelles*, a catholic newspaper that was considered to be voicing the government's stance, described the intervention of the Radical Liberals in February 1894 as a “conspiracy of the Radical Left... that took the Chamber by surprise”. Wondering “which feverish mosquito bite had affected them”, the journalist could only conclude that they unjustly attacked Belgian diplomats to “pay court to the revolutionary socialists”.⁵⁵⁰ In the domestic political arena, Radical Liberals, much like socialists, championed ‘mimetic’ representation. This more radical, direct form of democracy implied that political parties each promoted the interests of a certain social group and that all citizens possessed equal and guaranteed access to policymaking, in order for parliament and government to harmonically mirror the nation.⁵⁵¹ They seem to have wanted to apply the same standards of harmony and equality to the corps of public servants that represented the nation on the international political scene.

D’Andrimont might have taken delight in hearing that after his disappearance from parliament, his ideas were repeated by a Catholic senator. Having found that the top European legations, such as the one in France, were overcrowded with first and second secretaries, who generally obtained many successes as “beautiful waltzers” but only few in the fields of diplomatic and commercial relations, Baron Charles de Coninck de Merckem proposed to send these young diplomats to the Far East or Latin America, where they could meet the shortage of consuls and at the same time gain the necessary economic expertise. He also suggested to give junior diplomatic postings to consuls.⁵⁵² Such interpenetration would certainly have increased not only the political and economic negotiating skills of both groups, but also the democratic outlook of Belgium’s foreign representation.

Most remarkable, however, was the argumentation of Alphonse Nothomb. This Catholic MP was the great-uncle of the aforementioned future nationalist Pierre Nothomb and the brother of the deceased revolutionary diplomat and fierce unionist Jean-Baptiste. While

⁵⁴⁸ PHK, 5 July 1895, 2080-2082; PHS, 16 July 1895, 496-504; id., 17 July 1895, 505-516.

⁵⁴⁹ DENECKERE, Gita, *Sire, het volk mort. Sociaal protest in België, 1831-1918*, Antwerp, 1997, 221-262.

⁵⁵⁰ ANONYMOUS, “Autour d’un budget”, *Journal de Bruxelles*, 26 February 1894.

⁵⁵¹ See RÖTTGER, Rik, “Een rode draad voor een blauw verhaal. De links-liberale uitwerking van mimetische representatie en de opvattingen over democratisch burgerschap in België, 1893-1900”, *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 120, 2005, 435-465 (especially 465).

⁵⁵² PHS, 17 July 1895, 500.

defending Belgian diplomats, Alphonse Nothomb felt he had to acknowledge that access to the diplomatic corps was too restricted. More importantly, according to Nothomb, because of their permanent residence abroad, diplomats had lost touch with public opinion. “They do not live, in one word, our life: this is a cause of debilitation”, he continued. The solution would be “to put, from time to time, some prominent people, from politics or elsewhere, in charge of our greatest legations. To rejuvenate, to revive with new blood is always a healthy measure. The representation of the country abroad would result to be more real and more efficient.”⁵⁵³ At the time of his intervention, Nothomb was a week away from turning seventy-eight years old. Despite his age, he was still one of the most active and progressive advocates of democratization within the Catholic Party. Nothomb maintained close relations with the young generation of politicians that forged Belgian Christian democracy in the early 1890s, such as Henry Carton de Wiart and Jules Renkin. These men voiced similar ideas about the need to increase the physical qualities of the Belgian ‘race’ in press and parliament.⁵⁵⁴ A new, holistic paradigm underlay their reasoning: while most conservative Catholics and Liberals still conceived of the national community that they represented as a gathering of autonomous and (principally) equal individuals, these democrats understood the nation as a body, as a complex organism of social groups.⁵⁵⁵ Physicians had influenced social scientists, and together they had convinced progressive parliamentarians that this organism was actually very sick. Discourses about degeneration ran so rampant in European intellectual and political circles that such organic imagery transformed from a merely illustrative metaphor into a cogent analogy. In 1895, the influential French sociologist Emile Durkheim had published his ideas about politicians as doctors who had to prevent or cure social diseases.⁵⁵⁶ This point of view seems to have appealed to Nothomb to such an extent that he applied it to the nation’s foreign representation. In his opinion the diplomatic body was sick, too, and could turn healthy again only by infusing new blood that sprung from within the nation’s territory. This social-holistic paradigm was fleshed out in more progressive, socialist ways on the one hand,

⁵⁵³ PHS, 17 July 1895, 505.

⁵⁵⁴ DE SMAELE, Henk, *Rechts Vlaanderen: religie en stemgedrag in negentiende-eeuws België*, Leuven, 2009, 230-235. See also the essays of Carton de Wiart collected and published by Pierre Nothomb: CARTON DE WIART, Henry, *Le bon combat*, Paris, 1913.

⁵⁵⁵ DE SMAELE, Henk, “Politiek als hanengevecht”, 346; DE SMAELE, Henk, “Het Belgische politieke discours en de ‘eigenheid’ van de vrouw aan het einde van de negentiende eeuw”. *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*, 1/4, 1998, 29.

⁵⁵⁶ NYS, Liesbet, “Een medisch object”, in: Liesbet Nys Henk De Smaele, Jo Tollebeek and Kaat Wils, *De zieke natie: over de medicalisering van de samenleving 1860-1914*, Groningen, 2002, 11-12 and 17; DEFERME, Jo, “Debatteren over pijnstillers: de arbeidswetgeving in het parlement”, in Liesbet NYS, et al. (eds.), *De zieke natie: over de medicalisering van de samenleving 1860-1914*, Groningen, 2002, 243.

and in more conservative, corporatist ways on the other hand.⁵⁵⁷ Nothomb's suggestion to put (political) personalities in charge of major diplomatic postings surely went well with corporatist logics. It fitted perfectly within the framework of mimetic representation, too. Beyond its borders, the nation would be represented by elected politicians and by heads of the different social-economic bodies that constituted the nation, both of whom were judged to be more in touch than diplomats with the needs and urges of domestic society.

Foreign Minister Jules de Burlet did not seem to perceive the criticisms that Nothomb's discourse contained, and actually thanked him for standing up for Belgian diplomats. The comments uttered by Baron de Coninck seem to have taken Burlet by surprise, as he admitted, and his answer to them was very short but nonetheless contained at least one falsehood.⁵⁵⁸ Burlet was only really able, after a few days had passed, to respond to criticisms coming from Radical Liberals and from Socialists.

Prior to the debates in parliament, Foreign Ministers generally ordered the Political and Commercial Directions to provide them with the necessary arguments to defend the Department and its policies. Not only the previous budget discussions but especially the sections sessions gave diplomats and bureaucrats at the Political Direction an idea of what criticisms on the Belgian diplomatic apparatus were to be expected during the plenary session. In these sections sessions, a smaller group of delegates from all parties represented in parliament discussed the following year's budget, which resulted in a report to be submitted to parliament for discussion during the plenary sessions.⁵⁵⁹ The latter were published in their entirety in the Parliamentary Proceedings and partly – with or without comments – in various Belgian newspapers; debates in the sections sessions, too, received their share of media coverage.⁵⁶⁰ In late 1894, they even provoked some controversy between progressive and conservative press organs. During the sections session, the socialist delegate Emile Vandervelde had questioned whether the social usefulness of diplomats really justified their

⁵⁵⁷ DE SMAELE, "Het Belgische politieke discours", 29.

⁵⁵⁸ De Coninck had supported his argument about the unnecessary abundance of young diplomats in nearby legations by pointing out that the Belgian legation in Paris counted no less than four secretaries. He probably found this information in the *Almanach Royal*, which annually listed the whereabouts of Belgian diplomats and indeed confirmed for the years 1894 and 1895 the presence of four secretaries in Paris. See AR, 1895, 26; 1896, 26. Burlet, by contrast, claimed that de Coninck's argument did not hold, since there were only two secretaries at the Belgian legation in France. See PHS, 17 July 1895, 512-513.

⁵⁵⁹ For these procedures and their historical development, see TOEBOSCH, Emile, *Parlementen en reglementen*, Brussels, 1991, 83-107.

⁵⁶⁰ On the 1894 foreign budget debates, see ANONYMOUS, "Chambre des représentants", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 15 February 1894; ANONYMOUS, "A la Chambre", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 21 February 1894; ANONYMOUS, "Chambre des représentants", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 22 and 23 February 1894; ANONYMOUS, "Autour d'un budget", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 26 February 1894; ZWEEP MANS, "Onze vertegenwoordiger in den vreemde", *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 13 March 1894.

astronomic salaries. He did not think so and believed that one of his fellow party members, who would gladly occupy a major diplomatic posting for only a third of that salary, could do the job just as well. The progressive liberal newspaper *La Chronique* noted that Vandervelde's colleague would require a strong stomach to support his ambitions, for "the role of our diplomats abroad consists in eating foie gras – at someone else's place. They do not even have to return the courtesy."⁵⁶¹

The Political Direction thus had to prove that the Belgian diplomatic corps was in fact very useful and not overpaid. In constructing its argumentation, it could surely draw on prior parliamentary debates and the internal documents they had generated. After all, these criticisms had been uttered before. The difference, however, lay in the perspective on which the new criticisms were based. The discourse about economic expertise had indeed become much more infused with the requirement of democratic representation. The difference also lay in the larger parliamentary support for such discourses. While at the end of previous foreign budget discussions virtually every year every parliamentarian voted approvingly, the democrats who occupied the opposition banks from 1894 onwards refused to do so.⁵⁶² One could expect that this changing climate might have convinced the personnel of the Political Direction that the existing documentation alone would not suffice, and might have spurred it to undertake more thoroughgoing studies to provide the Foreign Minister, who at that time was Count Henri de Merode-Westerloo, with useful arguments. However, the Direction assumed a rather resigned attitude.

When de Merode asked bureaucrats at the Political Direction in December 1894 "to draft him a note containing all the arguments to adduce in order to justify the utility of diplomacy", they initially feigned a lack of understanding that the Chamber would really question the usefulness of diplomacy as a phenomenon, especially considering that it only treated Belgian affairs. They concluded that the Foreign Minister actually meant Belgian diplomacy and, more particularly, the Belgian diplomatic corps. Judging by prior foreign budget debates, they expected that MPs would either ask to abolish the entire diplomatic corps, or just a few legations, or alternatively, to substitute all diplomats with consuls. The Political Direction chose not to answer the second question, as this was impossible without

⁵⁶¹ *La Chronique* quoted in ANONYMOUS, "Nieuws uit Brussel", *Het Handelsblad*, 25 november 1894; and in ANONYMOUS, "Le métier de diplomates", *Le Peuple*, 26 November 1894. See also ANONYMOUS, "L'examen du budget en sections", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 23 November 1894.

⁵⁶² Between 1886 and 1893, all members of the Chamber of Representatives and all but one senator (in 1886) voted in favour of the budget. Between 1894 and 1914, the approval rate averaged about seventy-five per cent in the Chamber. In the Senate, it still went over ninety-five per cent between 1894 and 1905, but dropped to an average eighty-four per cent between 1910 and 1914.

knowing which postings parliament wished to have abolished. To help de Merode in his reply to the first question, officials at the Political Direction merely dug up a selection of older parliamentary discourses in favour of the diplomatic corps and gathered a dozen quotes from standard works of international law. They had to admit that the resulting note was filled with commonplaces, the fact of the matter remaining that “a state with no representatives abroad is no longer a state”. The note also pointed to Belgian neutrality, the mandatory statute by which the government really had to avoid isolation in the Concert of Nations, according to the Political Direction. Maintaining neutrality indeed meant anticipating changing dispositions of neighbouring countries towards Belgium. This necessitated a qualified diplomatic corps. Skipping to the question of replacing diplomats with consuls, the Political Direction admonished that consuls were not up to the task and that quite a lot of difficult negotiations had failed because of “ignorant men” who did not inspire the same confidence as diplomatic agents. Although the Political Direction felt that these observations should do, since “there is no reason to follow the adversaries of our diplomatic corps to the field where they want to place the matter”, it could not resist to point out that “strangely enough, especially republican states tend to be touchy about the types of agents sent to them.” Convinced that “the detractors” of the diplomatic corps would always be outnumbered in parliament, the Political Direction might have judged that Merode could easily afford this subtle lash at the presumably inconsistent discourse of Belgian democrats, many of whom were believed to prefer a republican polity over a monarchy.⁵⁶³

Inconsistency might also have been the first thought that came to the minds of the Political Direction’s officials when they heard that socialists were planning to attack the elevated salaries of the diplomatic corps. “Wealth is the implicit condition for entering the career”, they argued, “so it is rather astounding that representatives who claim to particularly represent the disinherited classes, would ask that access to the career be made even more difficult.” Possibly because advancing such an argument came down to moving the discussion to where the diplomats’ adversaries would have wanted to lead it, namely the field of democracy, they suggested that the Foreign Minister could better bring to the opposition’s attention that Belgian diplomats were generally paid less than their colleagues of other small states and often not even half of what diplomats from larger states received. The Political

⁵⁶³ AMBZ, 12.978, “Réorganisation des services extérieurs”, “Notes sur l’utilité du corps diplomatique”, 21-25 December 1894; DENECKERE, *Sire, het volk mort*, 254-256.

Direction was happy to provide the Minister with a few foreign newspaper articles that could serve as proof for this situation.⁵⁶⁴

Just one week before the 1895 foreign budget discussions were to take place, however, de Merode had to pass the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to his colleague Jules de Burlet. The new Minister appeared quite unprepared before the Chamber. Initially, he refused to reply to Anseele's speech, arguing that the "calculated brutality" and "extremely insulting parlance" of the socialist delegate released him from that responsibility. Later on, however, he did address the question of the diplomats' utility but did so simply by referring to and quoting from the speech of his predecessor, who had argued at the previous foreign budget discussions that diplomats rendered important services to Belgian industrialists. This argument might have struck parliamentarians as more convincing than the legalistic one that the Political Direction had provided beforehand. Burlet only replied at the very end of the 1895 budget debates to Anseele's proposal to strongly reduce the diplomatic salaries. He carefully avoided any reference to the social composition of the diplomatic corps, and in this way he even neglected to draw parliament's attention to the contradictions in the socialists' discourse. He simply argued that if the Chamber would approve Anseele's amendment, it would be voting for the abolition of the diplomatic corps. This, Burlet knew for sure, would never happen.

The accessible sources seem to remain silent about how members of the diplomatic corps perceived and reacted to the louder criticisms uttered against them in parliament after the extensions of the franchise in 1893. Yet to a certain extent their attitude might be derived from the Political Direction's reaction of quasi-indifference and belief that criticisms expressed in parliament were absurd and inspired by a complete ignorance of the conditions of foreign representation.

Merging the Diplomatic and Consular Careers?

The following two decades of parliamentary debates about the Belgian diplomatic corps witnessed four significant changes. First, criticisms about the diplomats' presumed ignorance of the 'Flemish' tongue were uttered in parliament from 1905 onwards. The radical democrat and Flemish militant Pieter Daens almost annually asked the Foreign Minister to appoint at least one Flemish-speaking diplomat per legation. The Minister seems not to have understood the question, for the few times that he replied to Daens, he assured him that most consuls did

⁵⁶⁴ AMBZ, 12.941, "Traitements des diplomates", Map 1: Traitements des chefs de mission diplomatiques, Note of Direction P: "Les traitements diplomatiques, s.d. [June 1895].

speak Flemish.⁵⁶⁵ In the late nineteenth century, parliamentarians had regularly condemned Belgium's consuls for not speaking the language of many expatriates residing in areas where they represented Belgian interests.⁵⁶⁶ Very seldom, however, had they required the same from the country's diplomats. In 1858, a parliamentary committee proposed to introduce a 'profound' knowledge of the Flemish language as a requisite for passing the diplomatic exam. The Foreign Minister refused, arguing that such a measure would needlessly complicate recruitment. When organizations within the Flemish Movement uttered the same request from the late 1880s onwards, they had to wait for almost a decade for the Foreign Minister to answer that he judged the presence at every legation of one diplomat who spoke Flemish, to be sufficient.⁵⁶⁷ If Daens were to be believed, this was not the case. In the years before the First World War, the Foreign Minister received many complaints from Flemish militants. It particularly offended them, they claimed, that the head of the Belgian legation in The Hague not only answered their letters exclusively in French, but even demanded to be addressed in that language.⁵⁶⁸ It would take until after the First World War before active knowledge of Dutch became part of the diplomatic exam, and several decades before most diplomats themselves started to accept the validity of the Flemish language.

Second, socialist MPs appear to have lost their interest in Belgian diplomats. Their last comments date from 1907.⁵⁶⁹ Afterwards, as will be seen in the second section of this chapter, only one of them intervened during the foreign budget debates, criticizing not Belgian diplomats but the system of diplomatic practice. Moreover, the socialists' gradual abandonment of criticisms about the aristocratic character and high salaries of the diplomatic corps, appears to have coincided with an increasing appraisal of the services of Belgian diplomats by other parliamentarians. In August 1903, Political Director Léon Arendt was thus very satisfied to find that "members of the legislature have insisted that certain salaries of

⁵⁶⁵ See PHK, 11 May 1905, 1342; Id., 22 March 1907, 867 and 873; Id., 30 April 1910, 1552; Id., 11 July 1911, 1790-1791; Id., 12 June 1913, 1540. There were no discussions in 1906 and 1914. On Daens and 'Daensism', the Christian democratic movement inspired by Pieter and especially by his brother Adolf, see VAN ISACKER, Karel, *Het Daensisme. De teleurgang van een onafhankelijke, christelijke arbeidersbeweging in Vlaanderen. 1893-1914*, Antwerp, 1959.

⁵⁶⁶ See for instance PHS, 19 May 1897, 1416-1417; Id., 31 March 1898, 989.

⁵⁶⁷ ROOSENS, Claude, "Les agents des services extérieurs", 272-273 ; DE WAELE, Maria, "Diplomatie en V.B.", in DE SCHRYVER, *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, 962-969.

⁵⁶⁸ AMBZ, Classeent B, 72 I-1, "Mobilisation", "Emploi de la langue flamande dans la correspondance avec des particuliers", August Peel to Julien Davignon, 12 July 1912; Karel Augermelle and Jef Kamerling to Julien Davignon, 26 April 1913; Julien Davignon to Karel Augermelle and Jef Kamerling, 17 May 1913.

⁵⁶⁹ Until around 1902, they kept repeating Anseele's charges against the utility of Belgian diplomats. See PHK, 22 February 1899, 666; id., 1 March 1900, 596; id., 9 April 1902, 1077-1078. In 1907, the socialist Célestin Demblon would state once more that diplomatic postings only went to rich noblemen, and that "if Jesus Christ would return to earth, he would not be deemed fit to be a diplomat." See PHK, 22 March 1907, 870. Yet among socialists in parliament, such comments had by then become exceptional.

diplomatic agents would be increased, given their insufficiency.” He concluded from the positive attitude of the parliamentarians that “they started ... to acknowledge that the majority of our diplomats are equal to their missions and render excellent services to commerce and industry.”⁵⁷⁰ Arendt understandably chose not to mention the minority that was not up to their task, and made recommendations as to how the extra budget should be divided among the diplomatic personnel.⁵⁷¹

Yet it is doubtful whether all parliamentarians who had agreed upon the increase of diplomats’ salaries had done so to reward the economic diligence of Belgian diplomats. Liberal MPs in particular, favoured the increase for other reasons. Inspired by the legacy of Léon d’Andrimont, they combined their pleas for higher diplomatic salaries with demands for the reorganization of the admission policy to the diplomatic corps on more meritocratic grounds. Only in this way, they insisted, could the economic expertise of the diplomatic corps be sufficiently increased. Demands like these had become much more entwined with the discourse of democracy than in the mid-1890s, when socialists and Radical Liberals had difficulties linking elevated salaries with democratization. In the Chamber, one liberal delegate denounced the continuing aristocratic dominance of the Belgian diplomatic corps, which he claimed to constitute “the Gotha of Belgian nobility” and adduced this as the main reason for its presumed apathy towards economic diplomacy.⁵⁷² A senator from the Liberal Party added that “the democratization of the diplomatic service” required opening up the career to “men without fortune, but with the necessary intellectual, moral and physical qualities”.⁵⁷³ Davignon replied to such criticisms by plainly stating that diplomats held their own with consuls when it came to defending the country’s economic interests, and that the recruitment of diplomats was “not a matter of caste”.⁵⁷⁴

The third and most significant development in the years between 1895 and 1914 was the increasing dominance during the foreign budget debates of pleas for the merger of the diplomatic and consular careers. These pleas came from the same Liberal parliamentarians who advocated higher payment for diplomats and measures to increase the economic expertise of the diplomatic corps.⁵⁷⁵ It was indeed only a small step from perceiving that a

⁵⁷⁰ AMBZ, 12.941, “Traitements des diplomates”, Map 1: Traitements des chefs de mission diplomatiques, Note of Direction P, 4 August 1903.

⁵⁷¹ AMBZ, 12.941, “Traitements des diplomates”, Map 1: Traitements des chefs de mission diplomatiques, Note of Direction P, 4 August and 23 December 1903, and 13 July 1905.

⁵⁷² PHK, 12 July 1913, 1541.

⁵⁷³ PHS, 22 May 1914, 832.

⁵⁷⁴ PHK, 12 July 1913, 1549; PHS, 22 May 1914, 836.

⁵⁷⁵ See PHS, 2 August 1911, 506; id., 1 May 1912, 379-380; id., 22 May 1914, 832-834; and PHK, 23 April 1912, 1769; id., 12 June 1913, 1541.

broader access to the diplomatic career would allow the entrance of economically skilled agents to arguing that such men were already serving Belgium in the consular corps, and could thus easily become diplomats in a country whose foreign policy was primarily directed towards safeguarding its economic and commercial interests. At the 1905 foreign budget debates, this finding led the industrialist Aloïs Verbeke, who was one of four Liberal senators that pleaded for the merger of the careers during those debates, to ask Foreign Minister Paul de Favereau why the government “systematically refused to do here what is done abroad, where the separation of the two careers does not exist and where it would actually make more sense than in Belgium?” After naming all twenty French senior diplomats in active service who had started their careers as consuls, Verbeke asked Favereau to at least give the title of minister resident to senior consuls “to crown their career.” This, he argued, “would be an incentive for our most useful agents, for the elite of the official Belgian representation abroad.”⁵⁷⁶

On the one hand, Verbeke’s intervention raises questions about the connections between Liberal parliamentarians and consuls. Given that the Liberal Party counted among its representatives a huge number of industrialists, and that consuls were primarily concerned with defending the interests of Belgian industrialists abroad, ties between both groups grew closer as the country’s industry and commerce increasingly looked for markets outside of Europe. Their relations were further consolidated at the *Congrès international d’expansion économique mondiale*, which took place a few months later, in September 1905. One of the six sections of the congress dealt with ‘means and agents of expansion’. During the sessions of this section Verbeke listened to the suggestions for global economic expansion made by Belgian consuls, who participated in fairly large numbers. He also heard parts of the discourse that he had held in the Senate being literally repeated by some of Belgium’s top industrialists.⁵⁷⁷ The president of the *Conseil supérieur du commerce et de l’industrie*, Belgium’s main advisory body on economic matters, took the floor to plead for the merger of the diplomatic and consular careers. Yet, he added, such initiative could only be successful if complemented with “the democratization of these careers”, which meant increasing diplomatic salaries and selecting only candidates who were truly capable of defending the country’s economic interests.⁵⁷⁸ Another top industrialist conveyed the same message in a

⁵⁷⁶ PHS, 7 June 1905, 532-543 (quote at 532).

⁵⁷⁷ *Congrès international d’expansion économique mondiale tenu à Mons du 24 au 28 septembre 1905 sous le haut patronage de Sa Majesté le roi Léopold II et du gouvernement belge. Document préliminaires et Compte rendu des séances*, Brussels, 1905, 237-250.

⁵⁷⁸ *Congrès international d’expansion*, 238-240.

more militant language and was very explicit about the pre-modern link that he and his colleagues believed to still exist between aristocracy and economic inability and disinterest. According to him, aspiring diplomats from the aristocracy inevitably revealed “an initial deficiency of preparation and an all too certain incompetence ... in matters of business.” Moreover, this industrialist claimed to know that “diplomats hardly associate with the world of affairs: they float in other spheres, where one affects a certain disdain for merchants and factory-owners.” The one diplomat who did exert himself for promoting the country’s economic interests, he concluded, “had to endure the mockeries of his colleagues.”⁵⁷⁹ Gatherings like the Congress of Mons, which grouped Liberal politicians, consuls, and industrialists, must have strengthened the solidarity between these men and contributed to increase their frustration with an aristocratic and economically inept diplomatic corps.

On the other hand, Verbeke’s intervention raises questions about how the attitude of the Belgian Foreign Ministers and leading officials at the Department towards the diplomatic and consular corps differed from that inside other countries’ Foreign Ministries. In the case of the French Third Republic, there seems to exist some confusion in the historiography about how the diplomatic and consular corps actually related to each other in the decades before the First World War.⁵⁸⁰ Yet it does seem safe to say that the interpenetration between both careers was far greater in France than in most other neighbouring countries. The democratic and meritocratic image of consuls, who generally came from more modest backgrounds and had a considerably larger workload than diplomats, indeed reflected the ideals of a republic that exalted the rise to power of the most competent bourgeois citizens. Within the French Foreign Ministry, this helped to remove the stigma of belonging to the consular corps and eased transfers between both careers.⁵⁸¹ In the British Foreign Office, consuls did not enjoy such prestige. Moreover, until well after the First World War, members of the so-called Cinderella service had to endure the condescending attitudes of British diplomats, who made sure not to mingle with men from the consular career. Yet some of these men did manage to end their

⁵⁷⁹ *Congrès international d'expansion*, 248-250.

⁵⁸⁰ Paul Gordon Lauren, referring to the situation in 1908, claimed that members of the French diplomatic and consular services had undergone “separate recruiting and examination procedures”, and pursued “completely separated careers.” See LAUREN, Paul Gordon, *Diplomats and Bureaucrats: The First Institutional Responses to Twentieth-Century Diplomacy in France and Germany*, Michigan, 1976, 107-108. Isabelle Dasque, by contrast, argues that the fusion of the careers had, to a considerable extent, already materialized in the 1880s. See DASQUE, *A la recherche*, 60-74. The middle way suggested by M.B. Hayne seems to be most credible. Acknowledging the existence of a unified *concours* for the entrance into both corps and a certain interpenetration afterwards, he pointed out that “diplomatic and consular cadres remained distinct in principle.” See HAYNE,

M.B., *The French Foreign Office*, 14-15.

⁵⁸¹ DASQUE, *A la recherche*, 63-64; HAYNE, *The French Foreign Office*, 14-15.

careers as members of the diplomatic service.⁵⁸² At first sight, a wider interpenetration between both careers existed in Imperial Germany. However, this was largely characterized by diplomats occasionally holding consular appointments. Some consuls eventually became diplomats, but opposition from both the diplomatic service and the Political Direction in the *Wilhelmstrasse* against the intrusion of these men in the diplomatic corps remained particularly strong.⁵⁸³ The gulf between both careers appears to have been even wider in Austria-Hungary. Extensive reforms to professionalize the foreign services of the *Ballhausplatz* between 1906 and 1912 did nothing to bring the consular and diplomatic corps closer together. Diplomats could thus continue to treat consuls, who generally had more modest social origins but at the same time superior educational backgrounds, as inferiors hired by the state to do the economic and commercial work that would otherwise dirty the aristocratic diplomats' hands. Nevertheless, even in Austria-Hungary some consuls managed to transfer to the diplomatic corps.⁵⁸⁴

Much to the regret of Verbeke and many of his fellow party members, the Belgian Foreign Minister would not allow this to happen.⁵⁸⁵ The Department indeed maintained an even stricter separation between both careers than in most other European countries. No consul had ever obtained membership of the diplomatic corps. Judging from discussions in the Dutch Chamber of Representatives, a similar situation seems to have existed in the Netherlands.⁵⁸⁶ Although both countries had a more democratic polity than Germany and Austria-Hungary, which did admit a certain interpenetration between the diplomatic and consular corps, Belgium and the Netherlands were relatively small players on the international scene. Moreover, they shared a foreign policy of neutrality. These characteristics might have lessened the need for their governments to allow the entrance of the most meritorious elements of the consular service into the diplomatic career, and thus to have them compete with career diplomats for important postings.

Just as in the Netherlands, some of the most senior Belgian consuls did obtain temporary diplomatic titles. In the years after 1905, a handful of them were granted the title of

⁵⁸² STEINER, *The Foreign Office*, 184; CROMWELL, Valerie and Zara STEINER, 'Reform and Retrenchment: The Foreign Office Between the Wars', in BULLEN, Roger (ed.), *The Foreign Office, 1982-1982*, Frederick, 1984, 90. See also PLATT, D.C.M., *The Cinderella Service: British Consuls since 1825*, Hamden, 1971.

⁵⁸³ CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Service*, 18.

⁵⁸⁴ GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 14-15, 76, and 122-123.

⁵⁸⁵ PHS, 8 June 1905, 548-549.

⁵⁸⁶ Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 3 December 1913, 540-542. On the development of the Dutch consular service, see DE-MUIJ-FLEURKE, Hélène and Sierk PLANTINGA, "Hulp in het buitenland. De consulaire dienst", in Reinildis VAN DITHUYZEN et al. (eds.), *Tweehonderd jaar Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*, Den Haag, 1998, 123-143.

minister resident, but indeed not in the sense that Verbeke intended, that is as a gift to crown their careers. Around the turn of the century, increasing commercial ties with countries in Latin America and in the Far East incited the Belgian government to elevate its consulates in those countries to legations. At the same time, the men who were leading those former consulates became head of legation with the title of ‘consul general, chargé d’affaires’. In the months after the 1905 foreign budget debates, Foreign Minister de Favereau accepted the proposition of Commercial Director Léon Capelle to raise the title to that of “consul general, minister resident”. This, Capelle had argued, would add to the lustre of the new legations and would thus indirectly benefit Belgium’s commercial relations. Yet the men who bore the new title were enjoined from claiming entrance into the diplomatic corps and lost the title after they left the legation.⁵⁸⁷ This was the outcome of one of the earlier episodes in the power struggle between the Political and Commercial Directions that lasted until the outbreak of the First World War.

Three years before Verbeke held his plea for conferring permanent diplomatic titles upon consuls, Political Director Arendt had made it clear to the Commercial Direction that “a diplomatic title is not made to serve as reward or satisfaction for consular agents.”⁵⁸⁸ Yet Capelle highly favoured the merger of both careers and acted accordingly. When, in 1903, the Political Direction sent a circular letter to members of the diplomatic corps containing guidelines about the political information about their host countries that they were expected to provide to the Foreign Minister, Capelle urged Arendt to send the letter to the consuls as well. Arendt refused on the grounds that such a step would give consuls the wrong impression of their task. Even the consuls general who headed legations as chargés d’affaires, Arendt added, would not receive the letter, because “despite their title, which is only given to them to facilitate their official relations, they are still commercial agents.”⁵⁸⁹

In 1905, a few months after Verbeke and his colleagues tried to convince de Favereau to move towards a merger of both careers, Capelle proposed to the Foreign Minister that all six consuls who were chargé d’affaires would receive the title of minister resident instead. This pressure from without and within the Department clearly affected de Favereau, for he agreed to grant the elevation to four of them, and promised to do the same for the remaining

⁵⁸⁷ AMBZ, 12.943, “Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre”, Map 2: Libellé des arrêtés royaux nommant des consuls général revêtus de titres diplomatique, Note of Direction P, 18 and 21 October 1905; Note of Direction A, 30 October 1896.

⁵⁸⁸ AMBZ, 12.943, “Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre”, Map 2: Libellé des arrêtés royaux nommant des consuls général revêtus de titres diplomatique, Note of Direction P, 29 January 1902.

⁵⁸⁹ AMBZ, 15.911, “Services extérieurs 1858-1919”, Map 1: Circulaires relatives à la correspondance politique, Circulaire du 12 Mars 1903; Correspondance politique des agents du service consulaire rétribué, Note of Direction P, 23 March and 8 August 1903.

two in the near future. Arendt was furious, both for the procedure Capelle had followed and for the scope of the Commercial Director's proposals. While normal procedure required that the Commercial Direction consulted with the Political Direction first, Capelle had gone straight to the Foreign Minister. This "contempt for the division of labour within the Department", Arendt objected, was all the more reprehensible because it concerned "such a harsh measure, which subverts all the rules and all the traditions." Arendt then refuted Capelle's argument that consuls without diplomatic titles would not have access to the highest political circles in their host countries. According to the Political Director, experience had proved otherwise. Capelle had also motivated his request by invoking the many years of service of the consular agents in question. Such motivation, Arendt argued, was very problematic, for "it would mean that consular agents with a certain seniority will simply pass into the diplomatic corps." Arendt warned that the demands of the consuls would not end there. Seemingly convinced of the greedy nature of the men who defended the country's economic interests, the Political Director predicted that they would soon re-invoke the principle of seniority to claim the title of minister plenipotentiary, and "that stage crossed, diplomatic postings in Europe." The problematic nature of Capelle's proposition, Arendt explained, was that it would lead to "unanimous and energetic objections of the diplomatic corps", which would never allow consuls to become full members of the diplomatic career. More importantly, the Political Director concluded, this would have "disastrous consequences for the recruitment of the diplomatic career." Favereau tried to reassure Arendt by stressing the temporary character of the measure and arguing that it was not, as Arendt feared, a great step towards the merger of the diplomatic and consular careers.⁵⁹⁰

Arendt's concluding remark suggests that he was well aware that the same disdain for consuls that existed in the British, German, and Austro-Hungarian diplomatic corps, also pervaded the mental world of Belgian diplomats. In late 1906, Arendt noted that during their crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, Robert Everts, the Belgian minister resident in Mexico, had completely ignored Edouard Pollet, who represented the country as consul general in Guatemala. Pollet had complained that Everts had "abstained from every mark of courtesy towards him, and made clear not to want to socialize with him."⁵⁹¹ The "regrettable impression" that Everts's attitude had made to those on board of the ship convinced Arendt that it was necessary to subtly inform Everts of Pollet's sentiments about their encounter. It is

⁵⁹⁰ AMBZ, 12.943, "Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre", Map 2: Libellé des arrêtés royaux nommant des consuls général revêtus de titres diplomatique, Note of Direction B, 12 October 1905; Note of Direction P, 18 October 1905; Paul de Favereau to Directions A, B, and P.

⁵⁹¹ AMBZ, PF 417, "Robert Everts", Note of Direction P, 3 November 1906.

uncertain whether such measure had any effect, for this was not the last time that Everts assumed an antagonistic attitude towards Belgian consuls.⁵⁹²

One year later, Emile de Cartier de Marchienne, then advisor at the Belgian legation in London, expressed his feeling of superiority towards consuls in a more subtle way. Cartier had recently married a young American. On the envelope of the letter that notified his marriage to the Belgian head of legation in Buenos Aires, Cartier wrote: “Mr. Renoz, consul of Belgium, consulate of Belgium, Buenos Aires, Republic of Argentina”. In a social-professional world that valued markers of prestige and distinction very highly, this must have hit Charles Renoz very hard. Not only had Renoz been promoted to consul general five years earlier, his functions in Buenos Aires had also allowed him to bear the title of minister resident since almost two years before he received Cartier’s letter. “If this would have been an isolated incident, I would think this was a mistake and I would not attach any importance to it,” Renoz complained to the Foreign Minister, “but it is like this almost every time that I receive a communication, both official and informal, of one of the members of our diplomatic corps.”⁵⁹³ Renoz had indeed expressed his dissatisfaction with such practices before.⁵⁹⁴ He claimed to perfectly understand “that some of our diplomats believe to be of a wholly different kind than ours”, but refused to approve of “the arrogance with which some of them offend, out of prejudice in a way, our very legitimate susceptibility.” Renoz could not understand why Belgian diplomats so often gave in to needling their colleagues from the consular service: were they not “two corps of the same army, marching towards the same goal, with the same arms and on the same roads”, and did they not “serve the country with the same devotion, the same risks, the same sacrifices, sometimes the same satisfactions and the same honours?”⁵⁹⁵ Clearly, Belgian diplomats did not see it this way.

In European Foreign Offices where the most competent and ambitious consuls had the opportunity to enter the diplomatic corps, they all seem to have vigorously strived to obtain

⁵⁹² See for instance AMBZ, PF 1161, “Albert Moulart”, Robert Everts to Albert de Bassompierre, 2 December 1914.

⁵⁹³ AMBZ, 12.943, “Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre”, Map 5: Attribution de titres diplomatiques à des agents du service consulaire – République Argentine, Charles Renoz to Julien Davignon, 5 November 1907.

⁵⁹⁴ AMBZ, 12.943, “Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre”, Map 3: Attribution de titres diplomatique à des agents du service consulaire – République du Cuba, Charles Renoz to Paul de Favereau, 1 March 1906.

⁵⁹⁵ AMBZ, 12.943, “Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre”, Map 5: Attribution de titres diplomatiques à des agents du service consulaire – République Argentine, Charles Renoz to Julien Davignon, 5 November 1907.

this transfer.⁵⁹⁶ In this way, they would get on an equal footing with many of the people that treated them disdainfully. Was such desire part of a psychological mechanism through which the humiliated sought the approval of their humiliators? The case of Charles Renoz shows a consul reproaching diplomats for their condescending attitude towards him, but ascribes their insulting attitudes to prejudice and thus to some kind of misunderstanding due to a lack of information. Renoz could have uttered the criticisms so often repeated in press and parliament about the diplomats' lack of diligence and their disinterest in what really mattered in Belgian foreign policy, that is, defending the country's economic interests. Instead, he chose to stress the many dispositions that consuls and diplomats had in common.

Charles Renoz's career ambition was to become a full member of the Belgian diplomatic corps. His daily contacts with consuls-turned-diplomats in Argentina might have raised his hopes that the Belgian government, as it led a country renowned for its democratic traditions, would soon follow the examples of countries with less democratic polities that did allow the most competent consuls to become fully-fledged diplomats. In the meantime, Renoz might have judged it wise to try to increase the prestige attached to his current functions. In April 1909, he urged Belgian industrialists active in Argentina to lobby for the elevation of his functions to those of minister plenipotentiary. One of the letters the industrialists wrote was addressed to their colleague Emile Henricot, a steel factory owner and senator for the Liberal Party.⁵⁹⁷ At the foreign budget discussion held in the Senate a few months later, Henricot repeated the plea he had made several times before for the merger of the diplomatic and consular careers. Anticipating the refusal of the Foreign Minister, Henricot proceeded by very subtly supporting the ambitions of Renoz and other consuls holding the title of minister resident. "The first rule in terms of diplomatic representation", Henricot stated, "is perfect reciprocity." Yet, he continued, Belgium has many ministers plenipotentiary accredited to European heads of state who have sent only consuls to Brussels.⁵⁹⁸ The implicit message was that these diplomats were superfluous, while Belgium urgently needed to elevate the titles of its heads of legation in the Latin American countries where it had accredited ministers plenipotentiary, such as Argentina.

⁵⁹⁶ See especially GODSEY, *Aristocratic Redoubt*, 76-81. Godsey explains how in the Viennese *Ballhausplatz*, the Foreign Minister decided in the 1890s to institutionalize the transfer from the consular into the diplomatic corps via the *Dragomanat*, the translation bureau of the Austro-Hungarian embassy in Constantinople.

⁵⁹⁷ AMBZ, 12.943, "Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre", Map 5: Attribution de titres diplomatiques à des agents du service consulaire – République Argentine, E. Hardy and F. Mühlenkamp to Emile Henricot, 28 April 1909. The other letters are in the same map.

⁵⁹⁸ PHS, 23 June 1909, 348-349.

Commercial Director Capelle seized upon Henricot's discourse to try to convince Foreign Minister Julien Davignon to send credentials of minister plenipotentiary to Renoz. Again, Capelle neglected to consult with Arendt first. The Political Director did not fail to react. He pointed out that diplomatic titles were accorded to consuls with the explicit stipulation that they are attached to the posting and not to the person of the consul. Yet, Arendt found, consular agents had ever since constantly tried, with the help of the Commercial Direction, "to pervert" the scope of these regulations. The fears he had expressed in 1905, after the title of minister resident had been bestowed upon a number of consuls general, appeared to be materializing: "The title of minister resident no longer suffices; it is the highest rank of the diplomatic hierarchy that consuls claim today, ... and it is the European postings that will become the objects of their ambitions." Arendt saw this as a new step in the merger of the two careers, "or rather in the absorption of the diplomatic corps in the consular corps." For the Political Director, such amalgamation ran counter to the supreme interests of the diplomatic corps. The time had come, Arendt advanced, to establish firm guarantees "that the European postings are safeguarded from consular competition", and "that the rule which, for consuls, attaches the diplomatic title to the posting and not to the person, is confirmed and rigorously observed."⁵⁹⁹

Surely, Arendt did not share the disdainful attitude towards consuls assumed by many Belgian diplomats. Rather, he firmly believed in the utility of a judicially educated diplomatic corps that knew how to mingle with members of European high society and had the means to support this way of life. Moreover, protecting the dignity of the diplomatic career meant securing the exclusivity of its membership. At the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island, Arendt's functions as a lockkeeper and traffic controller indeed led him to not only evaluate the merits of (future) diplomats but also to protect them from the aspirations of the migrant workers hired to travel to and reside in the more remote and less luxurious resorts on the island.

Although Arendt was significantly more successful in this domain than in his relations with the highest aristocracy, he did not always get the guarantees that he wanted, at least not all of them. Less than a year later, consul general Fernand Van der Heyden was named minister plenipotentiary in Sophia. He was the first consul to lead a diplomatic posting in Europe, and the third to be conferred, albeit temporarily like his two predecessors, the highest

⁵⁹⁹ AMBZ, 12.943, "Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre", Map 2: Libellé des arrêtés royaux nommant des consuls général revêtus de titres diplomatique, Note of Direction B, 26 October 1909; Note of Direction P, 6 November 1909.

title of the Belgian diplomatic hierarchy. Van der Heyden, formerly consul general in Sophia, owed his nomination to his excellent relationship with the Bulgarian King, who had asked for him to be the first diplomatic representative after the Belgian consulate in the Bulgarian capital had been transformed into a legation. The Belgian Foreign Ministry claimed to be happy to satisfy the Bulgarian king's demands, but not before it had made an arrangement with Van der Heyden about the duration of his stay as minister plenipotentiary in Sophia. Davignon had asked Van der Heyden to request his recall – invoking “the desire to be nearer to his family” – from the Bulgarian capital within six months upon his temporary elevation to minister plenipotentiary, so that the direction of the legation could be conferred to career diplomats. The regulation that Van der Heyden would ask himself for a posting closer to Brussels protected Davignon – at least temporarily – from the inevitable criticisms that liberal MPs would utter about the consul's removal from Bulgaria.⁶⁰⁰ Van der Heyden had agreed on the condition that he would be sent from Sophia to one of the best paid European consulates and receive a decoration in the Order of the Crown. However, when Van der Heyden eventually had to return to Brussels, he claimed to prefer the posting of Montevideo “with the title of minister resident” above the consulate general in Bremen. This was refused to him on the grounds of “service requirements”.⁶⁰¹

It appears that in the case of Van der Heyden, Arendt had pulled off a coup. He knew as well as Capelle that the nomination of Van der Heyden to the posting of Montevideo with the title of minister resident would very soon be transformed into an appointment as minister plenipotentiary. Not only had Van der Heyden already held this rank, which despite its temporary character would strengthen his request to hold it again, the Belgian government would also quickly realize that the rivalries between the countries in the southern part of Latin America obliged it to uniformize the titles of its representatives in these countries.⁶⁰² Arendt's fears about the consequences of granting the title of minister plenipotentiary to one consul in South America had indeed been confirmed by the case of Hector Charmanne. A consul general and minister resident in Santiago, Charmanne was – after Renoz – the second consul to become minister plenipotentiary. The example of Renoz had incited Charmanne, and others

⁶⁰⁰ See for instance the intervention of the Liberal parliamentarian Maurice Crick in PHK, 12 June 1913, 1541.

⁶⁰¹ AMBZ, PF 1195, “Fernand Van der Heyden”, Julien Davignon to Fernand Van der Heyden, 12 March 1911; Note of the Cabinet of the Foreign Minister, 5 October 1911; Note of Direction P, 15 January 1912; Note of the Secretary General, 24 January 1912; Fernand Van der Heyden to Julien Davignon, 27 January 1912.

⁶⁰² See also the reasoning of Capelle in AMBZ, PF 1195, “Fernand Van der Heyden”, Note of Direction B, 26 January 1912.

with him, to ask for the same.⁶⁰³ In a letter to Capelle, Charmanne also seemed quite convinced that he would get it: “It appears that I will attain the purpose of my efforts. After thirty-five years that I work, thirty-five years that I run, that I wait, that I persevere, I will, I hope, be able to settle, to arrive at the final stage.”⁶⁰⁴

Although Charmanne’s senior by almost five years, Renoz did not consider his newly acquired title to symbolize the final stage of his career. On the contrary, he kept trying to gain entrance into the diplomatic corps. In August 1913, he even turned directly to a liberal Senator who he believed would favour his case. Pointing out that most other European countries allowed consuls who held diplomatic postings to preserve their titles after retirement, Renoz argued that the temporary nature of Belgian diplomatic titles awarded to consuls was not only interpreted by many of their foreign colleagues as a sign of the Belgian government’s lack of confidence in their agents, but also reflected badly on Belgium’s prestige in their host countries.⁶⁰⁵ Upon hearing of Renoz’s demarche, Davignon drew his attention to the inappropriateness of engaging “in direct correspondence with a member of the Legislature.” A delicate situation could arise, Davignon explained, “from public discussions based on the finding of divergent views between the Government and one of its agents.”⁶⁰⁶

Clearly, officials at the Political Direction felt that parliament threatened the privileged situation of diplomats. Their reaction, articulated by the Foreign Minister, was as it had always been: holding internal discussions behind closed doors and avoiding contact with the outside world. Yet some consuls seemed to no longer agree with this course of action and vented their frustrations to parliamentarians of the opposition, many of whom shared their concerns. The delicate situation that Davignon predicted arose during the 1914 budget discussions in the Senate, when the Liberal senator Louis Van der Molen questioned him about the conflicts between diplomats and consuls. According to Van der Molen, only the merger of the diplomatic and consular careers could lead to a better mutual understanding and thus resolve these conflicts. Moreover, the ambitions of consuls, that Van der Molen claimed to voice, received large support from within Belgian society: “Public opinion, the press, the greatest industrial and commercial personalities, all proclaim the necessity of an assimilation of the two services.”⁶⁰⁷ Davignon feigned not to know anything about these conflicts: “We do

⁶⁰³ See also AMBZ, 12.943, “Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre”, Map 3: Attribution de titres diplomatique à des agents du service consulaire – République du Cuba, Charles de Waepenaert to Julien Davignon, 2 December 1911 and 14 December 1912.

⁶⁰⁴ AMBZ, PF 412, “Hector Charmanne”, Hector Charmanne to Léon Capelle, 12 March 1910.

⁶⁰⁵ AMBZ, PF 1169, “Charles Renoz”, Charles Renoz to Edmond Steurs, 8 August 1913.

⁶⁰⁶ AMBZ, PF 1169, “Charles Renoz”, Julien Davignon to Charles Renoz, 6 September 1913.

⁶⁰⁷ PHS, 22 May 1914, 833.

not know what conflicts are referred to, and we have never received complaints on this matter,” Davignon replied, adding that “on the contrary, I have experienced the accord that exists between these two categories of functionaries.”⁶⁰⁸ The Foreign Minister tried to preserve the Department’s outward image of harmony. His exceptional use of the plural ‘we’ might have given him away, though. For whereas this ‘we’ might have included persons that did not know about the disharmony between consuls and diplomats, Davignon certainly did.

The manoeuvre of Renoz was most likely spurred by the more intense discussions about the merger of the two careers that had taken place in both Chamber and Senate the years before.⁶⁰⁹ These discussions had led the Catholic MP Baron Albert d’Huart, in his report on the foreign budget deposited in early 1913, to adopt a favourable stance towards Belgium’s consul-diplomats. While acknowledging that “the fusion is not recommendable”, d’Huart did wonder if it was really necessary “to maintain the restriction stipulating that consuls general conferred with a diplomatic rank lose this rank when they leave the posting that had procured them with it.” D’Huart went even further, suggesting that the Foreign Minister would allow these consul-diplomats “to compete afterwards with career diplomats to obtain some of the diplomatic postings.”⁶¹⁰

The report of d’Huart reveals that also prominent members of the governing party were disposed to question the sacrosanctity of the diplomatic corps. In political circles, the tide seemed to be turning in favour of the more ambitious consuls. Arendt had retired the year before, and was thus largely spared the disappointment caused by the foreign budget report. After his retirement, the office of Political Director fell to the career diplomat Baron Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy, who was seconded by, amongst others, the junior diplomat Gustave Guillaume. Young Guillaume wrote several long letters to the Foreign Minister to prevent the suggested measures from materializing. He basically repeated the objections made by Arendt, but adopted a more militant language. Allowing consuls into diplomatic corps, Guillaume argued, could only be motivated “with reasons referring to their personal vanity.” Moreover, Guillaume added, it would lead the Department “to ignore its traditions, and to end up in a situation absurd in itself and ridiculous as to its consequences.”⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁸ PHS, 22 May 1914, 836.

⁶⁰⁹ See PHK, 23 April 1912, 1769-1770; 12 June 1913, 1541 and 1549; and PHS, 1 May 1912, 379-380; 2 May 1912, 392 and 395.

⁶¹⁰ PDK, Session 1912-1913, n° 114, 24 January 1913, 7-8.

⁶¹¹ AMBZ, 12.974, “Organisation consulaire belge”, Note of Direction P, 21 January 1914. See also AMBZ, 12.943, “Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre”, Map 2: Libellé des arrêtés royaux nommant des consuls général revêtus de titres diplomatique, Note of Direction P, 5 June 1913.

Surely, such comments did not really help Davignon to prepare an answer to the suggestion of d'Huart that he could read during the 1913 foreign budget debates. So despite the fact that a Liberal MP picked up the idea of a certain interpenetration between the diplomatic and consular careers, and urged to move beyond this suggestion towards a proper fusion, Davignon chose not to reply to this MP and not to mention the similar suggestion advanced in the foreign budget report either.⁶¹² The next year, in the Senate, another Liberal politician made a similar request. Davignon waved it aside by simply stating that “these are questions that would take too long to examine in detail.”⁶¹³ Perhaps Davignon realized that his declarations in favour of the diplomats’ economic activity became ever less convincing as more parliamentarians started to question the division between political and economic affairs and lent their ears to the complaints of consuls. It would take the First World War and the resulting changes in power structures within Belgian foreign-policy making to allow for a small number of consuls to obtain their transfer into the diplomatic corps.

A fourth and final noteworthy development in the foreign budget debates, which only gained significance in the years immediately preceding the First World War, was the emergence of pleas for the integration of the diplomatic and administrative careers. At the surface level, these pleas embroidered on the theme of increasing the economic expertise of the diplomats. From 1911 onwards, MPs from the Chamber and the Senate urged the Foreign Minister to regularly recall diplomats for a longer period so that they could “refresh and update” their knowledge of Belgian industries and commerce. These requests soon turned into proposals for a greater exchange of functions between career diplomats on the one hand and officials of the administrative career in the Foreign Ministry on the other hand.⁶¹⁴ Davignon claimed to favour these exchanges, but added that lack of staff prevented him to structurally send officials of the administrative service abroad. However, he could inform parliament that temporarily recalling career diplomats to hold positions in the Department had already been put into practice, and cited the examples of Gaiffier as Political Director, and of secretaries like Gustave Guillaume who assisted Gaiffier.⁶¹⁵ Davignon failed to mention that these diplomats were not actually doing any economic work.

Looking at these suggestions more closely, it is remarkable that while liberal MPs motivated the temporary recalls of diplomats by the necessity to increase their knowledge of Belgian industry and commerce, Catholic delegates took a more holistic approach. In 1912, a

⁶¹² PHK, 12 June 1913, 1549-1550.

⁶¹³ PHS, 22 May 1914, 836.

⁶¹⁴ PHK, 23 April 1912, 1775; PHS, 2 August 1911, 508; 26 June 1913, 495.

⁶¹⁵ PHK, 23 April 1912, 1776; PHS, 26 June 1913, 495.

Catholic senator regretted that because of their long sojourn abroad, diplomats were no longer in touch with “the things that are done in the country” and “have somehow become estranged from Belgium.”⁶¹⁶ In his report submitted to the Chamber six months later, Baron d’Huart predated the roots of this problem to the very beginning of a diplomat’s career: “the agents of the foreign service leave Belgium after the completion of their university studies. Our diplomats, especially our young diplomats, are thus not enabled to know their country well enough.” It is necessary, d’Huart concluded, that Belgian diplomats “get to know Belgium again.”⁶¹⁷ The similarities with the 1895 plea of Alphonse Nothomb, who wished to bring diplomats back in touch with domestic public opinion, are noteworthy.

A Wider Perspective

Comparing the Belgian parliamentary debates about the foreign budget with those in the legislative bodies of the neighbouring countries reveals more parallels than differences as to the ideological affiliations of the diplomats’ critics, the contents of their criticisms, and the reactions of the Foreign Ministers.

Lamar Cecil, who analysed debates in the German *Reichstag* from 1906 until 1913, found that especially National Liberals, Progressives, and Social Democrats blamed the diplomatic service for Germany’s growing unpopularity in Europe. They associated this situation with the aristocratic composition of the diplomatic corps. Recruitment of diplomats from wider social backgrounds, they argued, could only materialize via the abolishment of wealth requirements and the reform of the examinations system on more meritocratic grounds. In the words of Cecil, German parliamentarians viewed diplomats as “profoundly ignorant of Germany’s life-blood of trade and industry, men who were denizens of the most rarefied society and who therefore had no understanding of the real world.” In Belgian parliamentary debates, the same confluence of nationalism, economic interests, and democratization operated, but in Brussels the illegitimacy of diplomatic representation was ascribed more to the diplomats’ estrangement from the people through their absence from the country, than to their aristocratic backgrounds, although the latter element was implicitly present as well. Both in Germany and in Belgium, deputies advanced that the path towards a more democratic and thus a more economically skilled diplomatic corps led via the integration of the overwhelmingly bourgeois consuls into the diplomatic corps. The small number of German

⁶¹⁶ PHS, 2 May 1912, 393-394. See also the intervention of Gilles de Pélicy in PHK, 23 April 1912, 1774-1775.

⁶¹⁷ PDK, Session 1912-1913, n° 114, 24 January 1913, 5-6.

consuls that became diplomats needed to be lifted. The reactions of both Foreign Minister and the Political Direction were characterized by unwillingness to give in to the demands of parliament.⁶¹⁸

Yet it appears that, in the years before the First World War, opposition to the Foreign Ministry's personnel policy was slightly greater in Berlin than in Brussels. Both the German and Belgian Foreign Ministers tried to respond as evasively as possible to questions from the opposition in parliament, but it appears that men like Paul de Favereau and Julien Davignon had more success than their German counterparts. Perhaps this was partly due to their professional backgrounds. Whereas the Belgian Foreign Ministers were all politicians with many years of legislative experience, the men who led the Department at the *Wilhelmstrasse* from the late 1890s onwards were all career diplomats. Reading Cecil's analysis of German parliamentary debates about diplomats gives the impression that these men adopted a negotiating stance towards parliamentary critics. This included acknowledging minor flaws and promising betterment. Their Belgian counterparts largely limited themselves to denying charges and ignoring difficult questions. Nevertheless, the eventual result was the same in Brussels and Berlin, as officials at the Foreign Ministries just kept recruiting, examining and promoting diplomats as they had been doing for decades.⁶¹⁹

These final characteristics were very different in Republican France, where both Foreign Ministers and – to a lesser extent – high-ranking officials at the Department often functioned as willing executors of parliamentary wishes. During the first decades of the Republic's existence, a number of them had successfully obeyed the motto “republicanisation and democratization”, gradually providing France with one of the least aristocratic diplomatic corps in Europe. Moreover, while for a long time French diplomats could not honourably represent the country with their salaries alone, Foreign Ministers worked together with the parliamentary majority to obtain gradual increases of the budget for the payment of diplomatic personnel. They thereby faced the opposition of both conservative MPs, who wished to reserve the diplomatic career for traditional elites, and Radical Socialists, who like their late nineteenth century Belgian comrades, opposed making what they labelled as superfluous expenses. Parliament and Foreign Ministers also found each other as to the merger of the diplomatic and consular careers. Despite the opposition from officials at the Political Direction and from members of the diplomatic corps, they introduced a single competition examination for both careers and established an equivalence between consular

⁶¹⁸ CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Service*, 324-326; LAUREN, *Diplomats*, 66-67.

⁶¹⁹ CECIL, *The German Diplomatic Service*, 326-328; LAUREN, *Diplomats*, 119-121.

and diplomatic ranks. They also allowed for members of the administrative service to acquire experience in diplomatic postings, and vice versa.⁶²⁰ All these changes, most of which had materialized before the turn of the century, gave the French diplomatic corps the image of a civil service that was far more ‘in touch’ with the nation it represented than most of its European counterparts.

Contrary to France, the Netherlands shared both Belgium’s polity as a constitutional monarchy, its foreign policy stance of neutrality, and its minor role on the European scene as a small state. This might explain why, in the Dutch parliament, discussions of the budget for foreign affairs ran along similar lines. In January 1898, the conservative Dutch nobleman and senator Willem Gerard Brantsen van de Zijp regretted that “annually, [the Ministry of] Foreign Affairs is attacked, either on the grounds that one finds salaries too high and one sees too little advantages of diplomacy, or one considers diplomacy as completely unnecessary, or one wants to change postings of minister resident into those of consuls general.”⁶²¹ In 1896, three years after a system of weighted universal male suffrage was introduced in Belgium, the Dutch government extended the franchise to include about half of the adult male population. This allowed the first Social Democrats to enter the Dutch parliament a year later, only a few months before the budget discussions of January 1898. As such, both in Belgium and in the Netherlands criticisms of diplomats did not originate in the discourses of the representatives of the working classes.

Another similarity with the Belgian case is that pleas for the merger of the diplomatic and consular careers intensified in the years before the First World War and that these pleas found their most prominent expression in Progressive Liberal MPs, who punctuated their discourses with the language of democratization.⁶²²

Moreover, despite the different professional backgrounds of Dutch Foreign Ministers, who from 1905 onwards all came from the ranks of career diplomats, their attitude towards criticisms uttered in parliament did not vary much from the ones assumed by their colleagues in Brussels. Also in the Hague, Foreign Ministers neglected to provide substantial replies to the questions of MPs that related to personnel policy. Foreign Minister Reneke de Marees van

⁶²⁰ DASQUE, *A la recherche*, 37-56. Peter Jackson seems to be less convinced of the success of parliamentary and ministerial efforts to republicanize and democratize the diplomatic corps and the Foreign Office before 1907. He considers the reforms carried out in that year as crucial for the career’s further development and argues that the effects became only really visible after the First World War. See JACKSON, “Tradition and Adaptation”, 164-196. Paul Gordon Lauren mentions criticisms on the French diplomatic corps before 1914, but these seem randomly picked from parliamentary debates and lack contextualization. See LAUREN, *Diplomats*, 52-54.

⁶²¹ *Handelingen Eerste Kamer*, 27 January 1898, 177.

⁶²² See especially *Handelingen Tweede Kamer*, 3 December 1913, 540-542.

Swinderen dismissed all criticisms about social backgrounds, lifestyles, and professional skills of Dutch diplomats as coming from persons who just did not know who diplomats were or what they did.⁶²³ His successor John Loudon responded to the Liberal parliamentarian Fridolin Knobel, who pleaded for the merger of the diplomatic and consular careers, that he was sure that Knobel “will not blame me for not elaborately refuting what he has said”, arguing that “a discussion would not be fruitful.” Loudon then repeatedly assured another Liberal parliamentarian, who opposed the creation of a legation in Lisbon, that “it would be very difficult to precisely indicate the desirability” of this measure, but guaranteed him “that I have not acted rashly, and that I have relied on the judgement of the most competent officials of my Department, a judgement grounded on experience.”⁶²⁴ Surely, these examples also reveal a slight divergence between the reactions of Belgian and Dutch Foreign Ministers, in that the latter were more outspoken in their dismissal of parliamentary requests.

Another difference with the foreign budget debates in the Belgian parliament relates to the political identities of the critics. Unlike Belgian socialists, Dutch Social Democrats did not progressively lose their interest in their country’s diplomats. As the First World War came closer, they not only pleaded for the replacement of all diplomats with consuls, they also intensified their criticisms about the almost exclusive recruitment of the diplomatic corps from aristocratic circles and continued to fulminate against the “abnormally high salaries” of men who did not actually carry out a lot of work.⁶²⁵ Although stated in less provocative terms, the discourses that the Dutch Social Democrat F.W.N. Hugenholtz pronounced in 1910 and 1912 in the *Tweede Kamer* sounded very much like Anseele’s 1895 interventions in the Chamber. Like Anseele, Hugenholtz made amendments to the foreign budget with the aim of reducing the salaries of diplomats. Hugenholtz did not want the people to pay for the presence of their foreign representatives in “the often licentious atmosphere of salons”, which was a “a world of intrigues and flirtations.” He was indeed convinced that “going out in high circles, the endless lurching, dining, banqueting and appearing on balls, is an excrescence, but not the actual life of the people.” Nevertheless, Hugenholtz had to acknowledge that his “democratic feeling” made him particularly amenable to the argument that higher salaries would open the diplomatic career to larger sections of the population. Yet reading the report of the parliamentary commission for the foreign budget convinced him not to alter his point of view. This report stated that “due to the required personal qualities of diplomats, it is unlikely that

⁶²³ *Handelingen Tweede Kamer*, 6 December 1910, 752.

⁶²⁴ *Handelingen Tweede Kamer*, 3 December 1913, 543.

⁶²⁵ For a plea for the replacement of diplomats with consuls, see *Handelingen Tweede Kamer*, 1 December 1913, 470.

other candidates than those coming from the wealthier classes of society, will present themselves for the diplomatic career.”⁶²⁶

The reasoning of Hugenholtz does little to explain why, in the years before the First World War, Belgian socialists no longer attacked the elevated salaries granted to diplomats. Perhaps they increasingly felt that their goals to democratize international relations could only be fulfilled by structural changes in the system of European diplomacy.

§ 2. A New Kind of Diplomacy

Pleas for Inter-Parliamentarianism and International Arbitrage in the late 1890s

In 1895, Belgian Socialists still directed their criticisms towards both the structures and agents of their country’s foreign policy. Anseele’s solutions for a more democratic diplomacy not only necessitated moving towards a diplomatic corps whose social stratification reflected that of the entire population, it also required bringing diplomatic practice closer to the people. This idea had long taken root in progressive circles. During the 1895 foreign budget discussions in the Chamber of Representatives, Anseele translated elements of this body of thought into the Belgian context. He stated that all governmental documents about foreign policy needed to be presented to parliament. Newspapers and official publications could then inform the people by reproducing debates about these documents. The Radical Liberal Lorand intervened in a very similar way. Much like Anseele, he found that aristocratic ambassadors who spied at foreign courts looking for secrets belonged to the realm of the past, and argued that modern, democratic times required important matters to be treated “directly between governments and under the supervision of parliaments, press and public opinion.”⁶²⁷ On several occasions throughout the nineteenth century, Belgian MPs had asked the Foreign Minister to allow parliament access to certain diplomatic documents. This had always been refused, on the grounds that foreign policy was the prerogative of King and government. Only a few years before Anseele’s intervention, the Foreign Minister had repeated that “such documents did not impart the Chambers any knowledge”.⁶²⁸ Not surprisingly, the more exacting request made by Socialists and Radical Liberals in 1895 was ignored.

⁶²⁶ Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 6 December 1910, 751; and 2 December 1912, 998-999.

⁶²⁷ PHK, 5 July 1895, 2080-2081.

⁶²⁸ AMBZ, Dossier 15.911 Service extérieurs 1858-1919, Map 1: Circulaires relatives à la correspondance politique, “Communication des pièces diplomatiques à la Chambre”, 5 November 1900.

In the Senate, Anseele's fellow party member Henri La Fontaine, a professor of international law, explained how inter-parliamentary conferences could take over diplomatic activities and create a transparent foreign policy: "Propositions will be discussed by the most competent members of the different parliaments of the world. In this way, they will pervade considerably and decisively throughout the globe." He opposed this future kind of diplomacy to the current practices of secrecy: "Now, it takes numerous negotiations between diplomats, in closed places, in secured rooms, where the public cannot go, to solve the most trivial international question".⁶²⁹ La Fontaine's project originated from the activities of international peace movements. Since the mid-nineteenth century, European parliaments had ideas trickling in about arbitration as a means of peacefully settling conflicts between states. By the late 1880s, British and French parliamentarians felt confident enough to initiate a series of inter-parliamentary arbitration conferences, which had to encourage MPs to urge their governments to conclude permanent arbitration treaties. Held almost every year from 1889 onwards, its membership figure grew exponentially and ever more countries had delegates present.⁶³⁰ The Sixth Inter-Parliamentary Conference for International Arbitration took place in Brussels, just weeks after the 1895 foreign budget debate. It had been preceded by a Universal Peace Congress in Antwerp, where La Fontaine and other scholars had developed a Code of International Arbitration.⁶³¹ A Belgian senator from 1895 onwards, he made vigorous attempts to rouse parliament's interest in such initiatives.

Before 1895, only socialists and liberals supported his ideas, and La Fontaine got little response from government circles. With the Brussels arbitration conference at hand, however, Catholic MPs, too, started to discern the possibilities offered by parliamentary diplomacy, be it to maintain peace or to fulfil personal ambitions. One of them was the young nobleman

⁶²⁹ PHS, 16 July 1895, 502. On Henri La Fontaine, see HASQUIN, Hervé, et al. (eds.), *Henri La Fontaine. Tracé(s) d'une vie. Un prix Nobel de la Paix (1854-1943)*, Mons, 2012. More specifically for his work as a Senator, see VANDE VIJVER, Gwenaël, *L'action politique d'Henri La Fontaine*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Université libre de Bruxelles, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 2002.

⁶³⁰ RIEMENS, M.J., *De passie voor vrede. De evolutie van de internationale politieke cultuur in de jaren 1880-1940 en het recipiëren van Nederland*, Groningen, 2005, 48-49 and 59-60. From forty delegates of two different countries in 1889, the conference counted two hundred members from seventeen countries. See DROZ, Numas, and Dr. GOBAT, "Proceedings of the Inter-Parliamentary Peace Conference", *American Advocate of Peace*, 54/8, 1892, 184. In the years before the First World War, membership figures of the organisation, that was renamed *Inter-Parliamentary Union*, amounted to several thousands. See ULIG, R., *Die Interparlamentarische Union, 1889-1914*, Wiesbaden, 1988.

⁶³¹ COOPER, Sandi E., *Patriotic Pacifism: Waging War on War in Europe, 1815-1914*, 91-96. See also LAQUA, Daniel, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1880-1930: Peace, Progress and Prestige*, Manchester, 2013. Due to its very recent publication date (late December 2013 in the UK), I have not been able to take the findings of this book into account.

Charles de Broqueville, whose star would soon rise within the Catholic Party.⁶³² In 1897, he joined with Lorand and a socialist MP to interpellate the Foreign Minister about the government's inclination towards concluding arbitration treaties with neighbouring countries. Referring to discussions at the 1895 conference in Brussels, he even suggested that Belgium would take the lead in organizing a permanent court of arbitration. Broqueville knew that many of his colleagues remained sceptical about such an institution, and endeavoured to convince them that it was not revolutionary, respected Belgian diplomatic traditions, was not too difficult to establish, and did honour the sovereignty of the peoples involved. Before concluding, he wished to counter a final argument, which he claimed to have hit him very hard, namely that "the project of the inter-parliamentary conference would lead to the fall of an institution that I have always considered as an institution of progress and peace. The diplomatic corps, we have to do it justice, has always, more than any other organism, contributed to the progress of international law." Broqueville stressed that he had always considered diplomats as "the wise, able and indispensable auxiliaries of international progress, of friendly relations between peoples, of world peace" and declared that "diplomacy will always be indispensable."⁶³³

Broqueville went to some lengths to reassure his audience that the establishment of an international court of arbitration would pose no threat to the continued existence of the diplomatic corps. He must have realized that, despite all socialist and liberal indictments of Belgian diplomacy and diplomats, the great majority of parliamentarians still preferred to refrain from interfering with the status and privileges of Belgium's foreign representatives. Broqueville must have also been aware of the opposition from the government towards any proactive behaviour of Belgian politicians on the international scene. During the 1895 foreign budget debates in the Senate, Foreign Minister Burlet claimed that the government certainly shared parliament's favourable disposition towards the inter-parliamentary movement, but also warned that as "delegates of a neutral nation", Belgian politicians should do "no more than expressing our profound sympathies for that generous association."⁶³⁴

Much to the frustration of Broqueville's Liberal ally Lorand, Burlet's successor Favereau replied in a similar vein to the discourse of Broqueville, paying lip service to the ideals of arbitrage but at the same time inciting parliamentarians to exercise restraint as to its

⁶³² PHK, 2 July 1895, 2031-2032. The best work on the early career of De Broqueville remains the older, unpublished Master's Thesis of Annemie Segers: SEGERS, Annemie, *Charles de Broqueville 1860-1910. De opgang van een politicus*, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Faculty of Letters, 1979.

⁶³³ PHK, 4 March 1897, 775-778.

⁶³⁴ PHS, 17 July 1895, 510.

international development.⁶³⁵ At the Peace Conference held in the Hague two years later, the delegates sent by the Belgian government ranked among the most ardent advocates of the arbitration principle. Rik Verwaest has deduced from their attitude that the government found international arbitration “an extremely attractive idea.”⁶³⁶ Yet, as Favereau’s answer to Broqueville reveals, those of the executive power who were responsible for foreign policy seem to have thought otherwise. In the years before the second The Hague Peace Conference, held in 1907, they managed to influence parliamentary dispositions towards arbitration to such an extent that only Socialists and some of the more progressive Liberals continued to unconditionally adhere to the principle. Moreover, the Foreign Minister sent the Belgian diplomat Baron Paul Guillaume to the Peace Conference in order to sabotage any resolution in favour of mandatory arbitration agreements. This sheds additional light on Guillaume’s request for a decoration after the Peace Conference. The diplomat apparently felt that his successful – from the Foreign Ministry’s perspective, that is – participation earned him one. In the eyes of the Socialist leader Emile Vandervelde, it rather earned him the nickname “Guillaume II”, a reference to the German emperor’s aversion towards arbitration and his alleged bellicosity. Vandervelde also claimed to know who Guillaume took orders from yet refrained from revealing the instigator’s identity for fear of uncovering the throne. The introduction of mandatory arbitration between states would pose a significant threat to Leopold II, as this procedure had repeatedly been propagated by international critics of the Congo Free State, precisely in order to have its sovereign brought to justice. According to Vandervelde, the King knew this very well and had therefore made sure to rally Belgian politicians to his cause. Verwaest has shown that Belgian parliamentary criticisms of international arbitration cut across party-lines, but generally came from those MPs who had actively collaborated to the King’s overseas projects.⁶³⁷ Surely, the same held true for Baron Guillaume, who had contributed to Leopold II’s colonial oeuvre almost from the very beginning.

Pleas for an Open Diplomacy on the Eve of War

Taking into account the discussions of the budget for Foreign Affairs in the years before the First World War, it seems that La Fontaine, with his substantiated arguments for

⁶³⁵ PHK, 4 March 1897, 778-780 and 783-785.

⁶³⁶ VERWAEST, Rik, *Van Den Haag tot Genève: België en het internationale oorlogsrecht (1874-1950)*, Bruges, 2011, 38.

⁶³⁷ VERWAEST, *Van Den Haag tot Genève*, 44-54.

parliamentary diplomacy in the mid-1890s, had planted the seed for further socialist interventions. Gradually, socialist MPs would abandon their criticisms about the aristocratic character and high salaries of the diplomatic corps, and turn their attention exclusively to the system of diplomatic practice. In the Chamber of Representatives, they talked about the benefits of international conferences and opposed such initiatives to the practices of “the old diplomacy”, arguing that “modern people prefer to debate about their interests themselves”.⁶³⁸

In the meantime, senator La Fontaine became ever more ardent in his attacks against traditional diplomacy and heaped ever more criticisms on Belgian foreign policy making. It still frustrated La Fontaine that the Belgian government kept refusing to take any initiatives in matters of international arbitration. Belgium never led but only followed, La Fontaine continued, “because our diplomacy is afraid of not being afraid enough.”⁶³⁹ Although starting from an internationalist rather than from a nationalist perspective, also La Fontaine was thus criticizing an attitude that essentially sprung from Belgian neutrality and that had pervaded the country’s official foreign policy mind-set to such an extent that the government felt that only utter restraint on the international scene could successfully navigate Belgium between the French Scylla and the German Charybdis.⁶⁴⁰

This attitude also explains La Fontaine’s other major frustration with the ways of Belgian foreign policy. He claimed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs adhered to a way of conducting international relations that was “surreptitious and secret like in the Middle Ages”, and therefore urged the Department to transform itself into “a glass house”.⁶⁴¹ In La Fontaine’s opinion, the publication of diplomatic documents would effectively contribute to such opening of diplomacy towards the public. Great Powers like France and Germany regularly published their correspondence about delicate international affairs, he argued, but “little Belgium who only has to defend pacifist and economic interests, publishes nothing or virtually nothing. Everything passes off in childish secrecy; the Belgian people may not know what its diplomacy does.” La Fontaine and his fellow party members found this situation to be “grotesque, ridiculous, stupid, ... and not the way to act in our age of light and debate”.⁶⁴² As their interventions indicate, some Liberals certainly shared socialist frustrations with this kind of secret diplomacy. One of them even stood assured that “clandestine diplomacy will soon be

⁶³⁸ The quote is in PHK, 11 July 1911, 1787. See also id., 30 April 1910, 1553-1554; and id., 23 April 1912.

⁶³⁹ PHS, 2 May 1912, 387.

⁶⁴⁰ This imagery is taken from COOLSAET, *België*, 191-194.

⁶⁴¹ PHS, 22 May 1914, 835.

⁶⁴² PHS, 2 May 1912, 387.

done with” and that “instead of being at the mercy of a few men, the fate of nations will be debated in public”.⁶⁴³

Only on one occasion, after a long intervention by La Fontaine, did Davignon provide parliament with an explanation, or rather with a denial, of the government’s secret diplomacy. “We do not have a secret and obscure diplomacy,” the Foreign Minister claimed, “but it is obvious that we cannot, not more than other countries, reveal certain delicate and confidential correspondences.” Davignon also assured La Fontaine that he “would never refuse to inform parliament about issues that could interest public opinion,” subtly adding “if no inconveniences would arise by doing so.” Surely, the latter condition relieved Davignon from the obligation to impart the Chambers with anything they would want to know. The Foreign Minister concluded by arguing that he was only following “the constant tradition of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”⁶⁴⁴

Davignon had been made aware of this solid tradition by internal documents drafted by Baron Guillaume, who once more revealed himself as an opponent of more diplomatic openness towards the people. Around the turn of the century, as we have seen, Guillaume had used his spare time as head of legation in Athens to suggest to the Foreign Minister and the Political Director some improvements in the organization of junior diplomatic postings. His daily pursuits in the Greek capital also allowed him to compose a study of the history of Belgian parliamentary requests for the perusal and publication of diplomatic documents. Guillaume found that Foreign Ministers had always invoked the country’s neutrality to deny such requests: they had argued that because Belgium could not take part in “the great events that shake the world”, Belgian diplomats could only observe, and “this task does not go together with publications, which would only deprive them of their sources.” To Guillaume as well, such secrecy was self-evident for reasons of confidentiality. Without it, diplomats could simply not do their jobs. Therefore, Guillaume concluded, “nobody has ever been able to seriously think about demanding, in a general way, the publication of the political correspondence of our agents abroad.” Yet in some respects, Guillaume also begged to differ with the Foreign Minister’s predecessors and with the current Political Director, Léon Arendt. Belonging to the minority of senior diplomats who held a more ‘active’ conception of neutrality and assumed a more militant attitude towards foreign policy execution, he argued that both previous Foreign Ministers and Arendt, who had recently restated their ideas, “went

⁶⁴³ The quote is from Van de Walle in PHS, 2 May 1912, 383. See also his discourse in Id., 2 August 1911, 512-513; Mechelynck in PHK, 11 July 1911, 1795; and Lorand in PHK, 12 June 1913, 1545-1547.

⁶⁴⁴ PHS, 2 May 1912, 395.

perhaps a little too far by saying that the political position and the neutrality of Belgium did not allow it to participate in the great events that took place in other parts.” Moreover, Guillaume continued, one former Foreign Minister “deviates still further from reality by affirming that Belgium had no political difficulties with anyone.” Belgium did have such difficulties with its neighbours, Guillaume objected, and has even published diplomatic documents about these incidents. Guillaume could provide almost a handful of examples of encounters that led to the publication or communication of political correspondence from Belgian legations.⁶⁴⁵ Surely, these publications did not contain any revealing information, and seem to have been primarily aimed at proving Belgium’s adherence to its status of neutrality.⁶⁴⁶

Davignon, for his part, merely used them – and the list of arguments from his predecessor’s speeches that Guillaume had also drafted – to counter parliamentary criticisms.⁶⁴⁷ Guillaume thus actively contributed to preserving the confidential character of the diplomatic profession. In the following years, he did not neglect to keep alerting the Foreign Minister to the dangers of publishing diplomatic documents. In 1911, Guillaume used a French newspaper column that warned against such practices to repeat to Davignon what could happen if they were to occur. If their political correspondence was “destined to be thrown, sooner rather than later, in the four winds of the public square and handed over to the passions of the masses”, Guillaume stressed, diplomats would refrain from transmitting important but sensitive information, and would draft their reports in an even more woolly and concealing language.⁶⁴⁸

The fact that Guillaume felt the need to condemn “these new ways of market place diplomacy” had a lot to do with the mounting criticisms in many European parliaments about precisely the older ways of diplomacy that he clung to. The international contacts of La Fontaine and his Belgian kindred spirits indeed led to the amalgamation of their ideas with those expressed in the legislative bodies in Belgium’s neighbouring countries.

According to Paul Gordon Lauren, criticisms by German parliamentarians about their country’s foreign decision-making process gained momentum during the 1906 Algeciras conference, which tried to settle disputes between France and Germany over influence in Morocco. They were primarily directed towards the prominent role of the Kaiser in managing German diplomacy, and condemned this system as dilettantism, personal rule and camarilla

⁶⁴⁵ AMBZ, 15.911, “Service extérieurs 1858-1919”, Note of Paul Guillaume, October 1900.

⁶⁴⁶ See STENGERS, “Le cas de la Belgique”, 30.

⁶⁴⁷ PHS, 2 May 1912, 395.

⁶⁴⁸ AMBZ, 15.911, “Service extérieurs 1858-1919”, Paul Guillaume to Julien Davignon, 27 February 1911.

politics. More generally, parliamentarians protested against the secret character of German diplomacy, and reproved the Foreign Ministry for shrouding its activities in mystery. The solution, put forward by members of all political parties but especially by those that had also criticised diplomatic personnel policies, would be to make the formulation and execution of foreign policy subject to parliamentary scrutiny.⁶⁴⁹

Despite the seemingly fruitful collaboration between Foreign Ministers and parliament concerning the professionalization and democratization of the diplomatic corps, the French Third Republic witnessed its parliamentarians making similar associations of the predominant forms of diplomacy with pre-modern practices. As in Belgium, debates focused on the publication of diplomatic documents, and parliamentarians pleaded for new methods, departing from the “ascension of the people”, who would gradually, through their elected bodies, take over the control and direction of foreign policy. The imagery of light and darkness also pervaded French debates, with deputies calling for “a policy of full light” and protesting against the “obscurities” and “mysteries” of diplomatic practice.⁶⁵⁰

Both the publications in which British Radical Liberals argued for a more democratic diplomacy and their creation of parliamentary foreign policy groups and committees give the impression that opposition to secret diplomacy was better organized in Great Britain than on the European continent. Yet, as Zara Steiner has claimed, parliamentarians were “poorly served” in London as well. Steiner even found that while Parliament democratized its control over foreign policy weakened. The publication of diplomatic documents, in the so-called *Blue Books* occurred on a far larger scale than in Belgium and in most other European countries, but the dispatches included in these books were highly bowdlerized and, like in Belgium, only served to suit the government’s purposes.⁶⁵¹ The British Foreign Minister seemed to ignore parliamentary questions to a comparable extent than his continental counterparts, and his subordinates treated parliamentarians with the same disdain as officials in other European offices did.⁶⁵² In the minds of its practitioners, the intricacies of European diplomacy could only be grasped by those in the know.

⁶⁴⁹ LAUREN, *Diplomats*, 55-62.

⁶⁵⁰ LAUREN, *Diplomats*, 45-48; DASQUE, *A la recherche*, 42-43.

⁶⁵¹ Only on one occasion did the Belgian Foreign Ministry publish a ‘colour book’ of diplomatic documents, like France’s *Livres jaunes*, Germany’s *Weißbücher*, and Britain’s *Blue Books*. As Jean Stengers has wittily remarked, the name of this *Livre gris*, or Grey Book, “allowed Belgium to retain its colour in the spectrum of European colours.” Yet this book, which dealt with Belgium’s break of diplomatic relation with the Holy See in 1880, was published in the same year by the Liberal government to serve in the political party struggle. See STENGERS, “Le cas de la Belgique”, 30-32.

⁶⁵² STEINER, *The Foreign Office*, 195-198.

Apparently, this not only held true for foreign policy executives of the Great Powers Germany, France, and Great Britain, but also for those of small, neutral states like Belgium and its northern neighbour. The Dutch parliamentary proceedings provide interesting insights about how the ideas about the disclosure of diplomacy cross-fertilized between different European parliaments, as they were voiced by an international network of primarily Social Democrats and Radical Liberals. In 1913, prior to directly quoting from speeches of “the famous Belgian senator La Fontaine” and of other foreign critics of secret diplomacy, the Dutch Social Democrat Jan van Leeuwen had punctuated his discourse with La Fontaine’s imagery about the medieval aspects of current diplomatic practices. Like Belgian critics in general, he denounced the fact that the ways of such diplomacy “do no longer match with the demands of our time.” Since the present time was characterized by “different conditions of publicity”, and witnessed “the peoples proceeding more and more to self-government”, Van Leeuwen agreed with many other European Socialists and Liberals that “the diplomatic system needs to be replaced by another one.”⁶⁵³

During the foreign budget debates in the Dutch parliament a year earlier, his colleague Hugenholtz conveyed the same message but contributed in a more original way to the new diplomatic ideology. He cited an editorial published in *The Times* that asked the question “who, then, makes war?” Hugenholtz rephrased the contents of the article and referred to the Balkan Wars that were then being fought in southeast Europe, arguing that “all the chaos and bewilderment that has existed there for years and years is deliberately encouraged by diplomacy, and the current war is largely the work of diplomats, and moreover, if there comes a general European war, diplomats will not in the least be foreign to it.” Similar criticisms about the war mongering of diplomats resounded in national legislative bodies throughout Europe. Mostly, however, they were heard in countries that took an active part in European politics.⁶⁵⁴ They were less frequent in smaller states with neutral foreign policies, whose diplomats were naturally less exposed to accusations of bellicosity. To Hugenholtz, this fortuity did not alter the fact that Dutch diplomats, “if they only had the opportunity to cause all this mischief, would not be a whit better than foreign diplomats.”⁶⁵⁵ Although Hugenholtz claimed to acknowledge that the system of international relations incited diplomats to resort to

⁶⁵³ Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 1 December 1913, 469-470.

⁶⁵⁴ KIESSLING, Friedrich, “Self-perception, the official attitude toward pacifism, and Great Power Détente. Reflections on Diplomatic culture before World War”, in Jessica C.E. GIENOW-HECHT (ed.), *Decentering America*, New York, 2007, 346-347..

⁶⁵⁵ Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 2 December 1912, 997-998.

scheming and war mongering, in the eyes of many of its critics diplomacy's structures and agents were inextricably intertwined.

Foreign Minister de Marees van Swinderen objected that Hugenholtz was wide of the mark. "If ever a war was conducted that was not due to the will of irresponsibly acting sovereigns, who listen to the infusions of irresponsibly infusing diplomats", de Marees explained, "it certainly is the Balkan War, which has arisen from the will of the lowest classes of the peoples themselves, who felt that they had to conduct this war to obtain complete independence for themselves and theirs."⁶⁵⁶ As de Marees's reply reveals, the enormous cleavage that existed between the proponents and critics of traditional diplomacy was grounded in a very different conception of popular capabilities to keep the peace. Whereas most Social Democrats and Radical Liberals saw the peoples, to whom they ascribed a natural abhorrence of war, as positive forces that could guide international relations to eternal peace through the mediation of elected legislative bodies, the Dutch diplomatic establishment looked upon the masses and some of their representatives as unguided missiles in a world of brittle balances.

Despite the bellicosity ascribed to them by historians writing from after the First World War onwards, many European diplomats shared de Marees's analysis of the possibly dangerous confluence of democratization and nationalism.⁶⁵⁷ Just months before the outbreak of the First World War, the Austrian ambassador in London firmly believed that "the quiet and unobtrusive activity of diplomacy" was successful "in gaining time when popular feeling is running high, in narrowing down certain irritating questions to their real limits – sometimes infinitely smaller than they appear in the excitement of public discussion – and working in this way in the interest of the peace of the world and the harmony of nations which must be the chief aim of all statesmen and diplomatists of our age."⁶⁵⁸ European diplomats felt that there was no need for a new kind of diplomacy. Until the war broke out, diplomats prided themselves that they had been able to keep the peace in Europe for such a long time. In the long run, war was inevitable, they believed, but their methods remained the best ones to avert it as long as possible. Moreover, the similar social and educational backgrounds that European diplomats came from and their constant interaction in European capitals caused shared memories of secret diplomacy's successes to contribute to their self-confidence as a

⁶⁵⁶ Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 2 December 1912, 1000.

⁶⁵⁷ For some historiographical insight on the foreign-policy makers and their attitudes in the years before the First World War, see MOMB AUER, Annika, "The The First World War: Inevitable, Avoidable, Improbable Or Desirable? Recent Interpretations On War Guilt and the War's Origins", *German History*, 25/1, 2007, 78-95.

⁶⁵⁸ Count Mensdorff-Pouilly-Dietrichstein quoted in KIESSLING, "Self-perception", 345.

professional group. This elite group considered public opinion, as expressed in parliament and the press, to be the main threat to world peace. Since the language of traditional diplomacy was interwoven with delicacies that only insiders could perfectly grasp, disclosed and publicized diplomatic documents would quickly take on different meanings in the eyes of the public, which might easily misunderstand them. For diplomats, public opinion could thus jeopardize carefully negotiated agreements. As such, reducing the influence of public opinion became an essential aim of diplomacy. This conviction explains why diplomats adopted a sceptical and sometimes even averse attitude towards initiatives like the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Although most diplomats regarded these organizations as useless and utopian, they also considered them to be public opinion's pressure groups and might have even feared their disruptive influence on the European balance of power. At the same time, however, the diplomatic establishment did not seem to adequately appreciate that preserving the more and more contested gulf between foreign policy and public scrutiny, could have serious implications.⁶⁵⁹

Taking into account two decades of parliamentary debates about diplomats and diplomacy in Belgium and in the surrounding countries, it appears that certain discourses about diplomats and diplomacy had been planted in the minds of many European parliamentarians, ready to be cultivated as the First World War erupted. Looking more closely at the Belgian case, it appears that two sets of ideas determined the representation of diplomats and diplomacy in the Brussels parliament. First, from the banks of the opposition, Social Democrats and Liberals urged the government to democratize both the group of men and the aggregate of methods that made up Belgian diplomacy. On the one hand, they pleaded for a greater emphasis on economic diplomacy, preferably executed by men coming from broader classes of society and possessing the necessary expertise to defend the country's commercial and industrial interests. Consuls fitted this profile. On the other hand, they wished to devolve the political aspects of diplomacy upon the legislative body in which they were seated. It could be expected that, after the war, the most active advocates of both the entry of consuls into the diplomatic corps, and of the foundation of a world parliament, which would partly materialize in the League of Nations, came from this group of Social Democrats and Liberals.

⁶⁵⁹ KIESSLING, "Self-perception", 345-365 (especially 350-351, 357-358, and 363-364); PAULMANN, Johannes, *Pomp und Politik. Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg*, Paderborn, 2000, 343.

Second, Belgian parliamentary discussions devoted a smaller, but nevertheless significant, place to what could be labelled as organic ideas of the popular sovereignty over foreign policy. The spiritual heirs of Alphonse Nothomb believed that the nation should be represented abroad by its head, which was composed of elected politicians. In a way, such ideas would take shape in the institution of summit diplomacy, which gained prominence during and after the First World War. Most likely, the lesser weight of these ideas in the Belgian foreign budget debates in the decades before 1914 had to do with the fact that their proponents had gained full access to the government when the war broke out. Christian Democrats such as Jules Renkin, the Minister of Colonies from 1908 onwards, but also moderate Catholics like Charles de Broqueville, Prime Minister from 1911 onwards, were not indifferent to the legacy of Nothomb. As Part Three will illustrate, these men indeed seemed to believe that, as members of the government, they possessed the most powerful mandate to represent the people on the international scene.

Of course, not everyone agreed that sovereignty over Belgian diplomacy resided in the politicians that Belgian voters had elected. This held especially true for the Ruler of the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island and for the inhabitants of the House in that resort. Armed with new ideas about diplomatic representation, politicians had set sail towards the island. These ideas had moreover stirred up dissatisfaction amongst migrant workers who had found temporary jobs on the island but wanted to stay there for good. Yet even if an alliance between politicians and consuls were to materialize, the Belgian King and his diplomats would not give up control of the Belgian resort without a struggle.

Before going into that struggle, a fuller picture is needed of what was happening on the ocean that separated Diplomatic Island from the Mainland. Its waters indeed not only carried the ships of politicians but also those of publicists. The next chapter will reveal to what extent these journalists perceived life on the Diplomatic Island in the same way politicians did, and whether they adopted similar attitudes towards the island's inhabitants.

CHAPTER 5. FRAMED IN TIMES OF DEMOCRATIZATION. JOURNALISTS VS. DIPLOMATS BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

On 24 April 1891, the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* devoted a significant part of its editorial to answering the question that Anseele would ask four years later in the Chamber. Unlike the socialist leader, ‘Bob’ the journalist allowed a man from the field – or so it seemed – to inform the newspaper’s readers about his daily activities. Asked “what do you do in X ... to kill time?”, this “seasoned diplomat” answered: “To tell you the truth, ..., in the morning, around ten o’clock, they bring me my hot chocolate, which I have in bed while reading the newspapers and my correspondence; - then, around eleven o’clock, I get up to take a bath and to confide myself to the cares of a hair artist; at noon, I have lunch and at one o’clock I go to the Legation, where I smoke a cigar and chat with my colleagues about cats and dogs. The rest of the afternoon I make visits; nearly every day I dine in the city; my evenings are spent in Society or in the theatre, afterwards I go to the circle to play some cards, that is if my colleagues and I are not supping in merry company... And that’s it! ... I forgot to tell you that I hardly ever ride my horse, getting up too late, exhausted from the fatigues of the night before.” Bob concluded the editorial inciting its readers “to give the necessary thoughts to the services that such an active and laborious diplomatic corps renders to the fatherland!”⁶⁶⁰

The very first edition of *Le Soir*, published in late December 1887, described the newspaper as “without political colour”, meaning that “it refuses to take a stand in the struggles that irritate and divide.” The clear repudiation of Belgian party-political animosities that this statement comprised, might have pleased Belgian diplomats, most of whom advocated similar unionist viewpoints themselves. They might have also liked how *Le Soir*’s self-description proceeded: “Observing an absolute neutrality, it intends to never offend nor hurt persons’ opinions.” This was indeed exactly how many Belgian diplomats interpreted their profession.⁶⁶¹

However, reading how they were portrayed in *Le Soir*’s editorial of 24 April 1891 would have dampened the sympathy they might have felt for the newspaper. Bob portrayed Belgian diplomats in much the same way that Anseele did, but the journalist went a little further. In Anseele’s view, diplomats did not do what they were supposed to do but at least they seem to have had energy to spare, for dancing the cancan requires some stamina indeed.

⁶⁶⁰ BOB, “Nos consuls”, *Le Soir*, 24 April 1891.

⁶⁶¹ DE BENS, Els, and Karin RAEYMAECKERS, *De Pers in België. Het verhaal van de Belgische Dagbladpers gisteren, vandaag en morgen*, Tielt, 2010, 30-33 and 350.

In Bob's opinion, diplomats stayed in bed until late, hardly worked during the day, and yet by the time they went to sleep they felt completely worn out. Bob's diplomats were as useless, frivolous and offensive as the ones Anseele fulminated against, but the journalist chose to stress their alleged weakness as well. This might suggest that Bob was more sensitive than Anseele to the organic view of diplomatic representation.

Bob was in fact Léon Souguenet, a journalist who from the 1890s onwards wrote for several newspapers but primarily for *L'Indépendance belge* and *La Chronique*. In the decades before the First World War, such journalistic mobility was by no means exceptional. Souguenet also founded the weekly *Pourquoi Pas?* together with his friends George Garnir and Louis Dumont-Wilden.⁶⁶² Like Dumont-Wilden, after the turn of century Souguenet would become more and more susceptible for the nationalist ideas of Léon Hennebicq and his circle.

Most likely, Souguenet never received any reactions to his article from diplomats. As public servants bound by utter discretion they were to “abstain from all polemics in the press” and could, at best, only speak in public through the Foreign Minister.⁶⁶³ Although *Le Soir*'s readership, identified by a German diplomat as “workers and domestic personnel”, might not have been aware of this restriction, it might have wondered if diplomats would ever express themselves in that way about their professional activities in a popular daily.⁶⁶⁴ In private conversations, of course, diplomats certainly did. Just a week after his promotion to the rank of advisor in July 1895, Buisseret, then in Washington, described to his mother how he spent most of his days: “In the morning, I get up at 8 o'clock, very regularly; chancellery, bicycle ride, lawn-tennis. Afternoon, I read (there is a very complete library here) and I generally ride my horse.” Buisseret then listed a range of evening activities, which have been described Chapter One.⁶⁶⁵

This chapter investigates how Belgian diplomats in the decades before the First World War were depicted in the Belgian press. More specifically, it provides a chronological narrative that compares the press representations of diplomats in the decade before Anseele's 1895 speech, with images of diplomats in Belgian newspapers published in the decade before the First World War. Assessing diplomatic reactions to these representations will prove more

⁶⁶² BERTELSON, Lionel, *Dictionnaire des journalistes et écrivains de Belgique*, Brussels, 1960, 108.

⁶⁶³ See for instance AMBZ, PF 1169, “Charles Renoz”, Léon Arendt to Charles Renoz, s.d. [early May 1910]; AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul Hymans, 13 July 1917.

⁶⁶⁴ The quote from the German diplomat – Unico von der Groeben, who at the time was chargé d'affaires in Brussels – can be found in WILLEQUET, Jacques (ed.), *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de la presse belge, 1887-1914*, Louvain, 1961, 37.

⁶⁶⁵ CRCCF, FFB, P301/1/3, Conrad de Buisseret to Béatrix de Bernard, 29 July 1887.

difficult, largely because the obligatory and perhaps also voluntary reluctance of diplomats to engage in public debates about their profession has substantially limited the available sources. Nevertheless, sparse fragments of archival material do allow to reconstruct some of the ways that diplomats perceived and reacted to the attacks from journalists on their professional dignity.

§ 1. The Belgian Press Landscape Before the First World War

Le Soir was one of many dozens of Belgian newspapers founded between 1880 and 1900, a period which has been labelled as the golden age of the Belgian press. The proliferation of newspapers in Belgium had benefited from the abolition of the stamp tax in 1848. However, it only really gained momentum several decades later, when technological developments had diminished production costs and the introduction of advertisements assured the profitability of publishing newspapers. The number of Belgian dailies increased from twenty-eight in 1840 to seventy in 1883 and further to 112 in 1911.⁶⁶⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century also the requirement of increased readership was met. Illiteracy indeed dropped from about half the adult population in 1840 to less than one out of five in 1891. Added to the public debates about universal suffrage, which raised the political and social awareness of ever more people, and the growing urbanization, which facilitated newspaper circulation and indirectly stimulated sociability, a significant amount of new readers were readily prepared to spend minor sums to acquire products of the newly established mass press. Emile Rossel adroitly capitalized on these new developments by first establishing an advertising agency and later on a newspaper, *Le Soir*, that published many of the advertisements negotiated through his other enterprise. Revenues from advertising allowed Rossel to distribute *Le Soir* throughout Brussels as “an absolutely free” newspaper, which it actually was only within a limited geographical range and which it would remain for only a limited period.⁶⁶⁷

When Rossel published the first edition of *Le Soir* in late 1887, his adoption of a politically neutral stance justified his assertion that he had founded “a new paper and a paper that is new.”⁶⁶⁸ Surely, this did not prevent that *Le Soir* gradually became reputed as a moderately Liberal newspaper.⁶⁶⁹ However, other Belgian newspapers indeed had much more

⁶⁶⁶ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 110.

⁶⁶⁷ DE BENS, *De Pers in België*, 350.

⁶⁶⁸ DE BENS, *De Pers in België*, 350.

⁶⁶⁹ See WILLEQUET, *Documents*, 37 and 44.

clearly identifiable political colours, albeit that not all published equally militant articles. Especially the elitist papers that started to appear in the early nineteenth century and continued to be published until after the First World War, adopted fairly moderate political views. On the one hand, *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, created in 1841 as the voice of the liberal Catholics, accepted civil liberties and by the 1870s had acquired the reputation of being the unofficial government newspaper in times when the Catholics were in office. Of course, not all journalists of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* accepted this government interference, but by 1890 rebel voices had been silenced.⁶⁷⁰ As we have seen, Catholic governments in the 1870s and 1880s assumed a rather conciliatory policy towards Liberals. On the other hand, *L'Indépendance belge*, founded in 1843 and throughout the nineteenth century considered as Belgium's foremost quality paper, had a doctrinaire Liberal seal yet was not suspected of submission to the Liberal Party.⁶⁷¹ *L'Indépendance belge* and *Le Journal de Bruxelles* had been the preferred press organs of the elite of about fifty thousand Belgians (out of a total population of circa four million) who in the age of census suffrage regarded both parliament and press as their personal privileges.⁶⁷²

In founding the Belgian state, this elite had established the freedom of the press so that new ideas could be discussed in a civilized manner and thus create a 'well-reasoned' public opinion. Yet when other newspapers started to turn into commercial enterprises, offered less expensive copies and rendered their contents accessible to wider sections of the population, these old, elitist newspapers had many difficulties keeping afloat. Older and newer readers were attracted by the low prices of papers such as *Le Soir* and appreciated the shorter, less abstract, and chronicle style articles, the petty facts, the illustrations, and the serialized novels offered by these new dailies.

Before mass newspapers came to dominate the Belgian press landscape from the late 1880s onwards, the ground had already been prepared by what Pierre Van Den Dungen has aptly called "the pre-democratic prelude of the commercial and subversive small press." *La Chronique*, founded in 1868, and *La Gazette*, created by former journalists of *La Chronique* in 1871, figured most prominently among these media. Both newspapers advocated progressive liberal viewpoints in a way that incited both doctrinaire Liberals and liberal Catholics to condemn them for practicing journalism as it was done in the French Third Republic. While *La Chronique* displayed all characteristics of mass newspapers in terms of

⁶⁷⁰ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 270, 278-279, 293-297, and 325-326.

⁶⁷¹ DE BENS, *De Pers in België*, 26; VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 49 and 140.

⁶⁷² LUYKX, Theo, *Evolutie van de communicatiemedië*, Amsterdam, 1978, 303; DE BENS, *De Pers in België*, 25 and 30.

selling price, writing style and contents, *La Gazette* was a little more expensive and adopted a more satirical and sarcastic tone. Its approach of domestic politics charmed primarily educated bourgeois readers.⁶⁷³

Of course, also other political dominations than liberal Catholicism and doctrinaire and progressive Liberalism already voiced their opinions in newspapers before the breakthrough of the mass press in the 1880s. Ultramontane Catholics primarily turned towards *Le Bien public*, which was founded in Ghent in the early 1850s and whose journalists believed that the press had to fully submit itself to the authentic elite of the nation, namely the clerics.⁶⁷⁴

On the complete opposite side of the Belgian political spectrum, that is among Socialists, there was less newspaper publishing activity. Socialists only disposed of a few weeklies.⁶⁷⁵ This was bound to change in the mid-1880s, when the Belgian Socialist Party was founded and multiple socialist weeklies merged into the daily *Le Peuple*. Because of the strong links between party officials and the editorial staff, *Le Peuple* quickly gained the reputation of being the antechamber of parliament. The paper was sold at a competing price and only belatedly resorted to advertising, so it took a while before it became profitable. Yet its journalists had more difficulties getting their message through to the workers, very few of whom read the newspaper. One reason for this was that the editors, often from educated bourgeois backgrounds, regularly filled their columns with long opinion pieces punctuated with socialist doctrines and formulated in a complex language. This would only change in the last years before the First World War.⁶⁷⁶

Another reason for *Le Peuple*'s lacking popularity among the working classes can be found in the surge of mass newspapers from especially the Catholic press, which in terms of readership also subdued newly founded Liberal dailies such as *La Réforme* (°1884) and *Le Petit Bleu* (°1894). Like *La Chronique* and *La Gazette* had experienced a few decades earlier (and continued to experience), fast information, interviews, and illustrations did not suffice to remove the popular classes' reluctance towards the exacting contents and literary language that *La Réforme* and *Le Petit Bleu* adopted.⁶⁷⁷ In comparison, the founders of the Catholic daily *Le Patriote* assumed a more business-like attitude. They relied on revenues from advertising, invited readers to buy shares in the newspaper and, more importantly, took a keen

⁶⁷³ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 77-81, 99-108, and 129.

⁶⁷⁴ CORNELIS, "Le Bien Public", 110-135; VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 294-295.

⁶⁷⁵ LUYKX, *Evolutie van de communicatiemedië*, 307-308.

⁶⁷⁶ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 231-258.

⁶⁷⁷ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 141-147.

interest in what readers wanted to know about. In this way, they managed to assure *Le Patriote*'s financial autonomy and acquired a wide readership, which helped them to sustain criticisms from the Catholic government. It also allowed them to have *Le Patriote* express what they labelled – but what the government did not always see – as “fully Catholic” policy recommendations, such as the establishment of universal suffrage.⁶⁷⁸

Not long after this aim had materialized, *Le Patriote* faced ideological challenges from *Le XXe siècle*. Founded in 1895 by the Catholic politicians Charles de Broqueville, Duke Joseph d'Ursel, and Joris Helleputte, the newspaper voiced the corporatist ideas of its owners. Yet while they all wished to obtain social peace by reintroducing a medieval system of corporations that united patrons and workers, d'Ursel as one of the country's leading aristocrats held much more conservative ideas about social equality than the democrat Helleputte. Broqueville seems to have occupied an ideological position somewhere in between. *Le XXe Siècle*'s corporatist propaganda and its attacks on *Le Patriote* did not gain it the readership that the founders might have expected. Only after the turn of the century, under the guidance of Broqueville's confidant Fernand Neuray, did the newspaper lose its elitist cachet, became profitable and gradually found its way to the masses.⁶⁷⁹

Although the French language press still dominated the Belgian media landscape, it can be argued that the rise of the mass media in the 1880s caused the greatest sea change in the supply of Flemish language newspapers. The establishment of the socialist party's newspaper *Vooruit* in 1884 was followed by the foundation of three low-cost dailies that quickly acquired large readerships. Two of these voiced Catholic political opinions, namely the Brussels newspaper *Het Nieuws van den Dag* (°1885) and *Gazet van Antwerpen* (°1891). While the former aimed to acquire the largest reading public and therefore tried to avoid mentioning Flemish political grievances, the latter did manifest sympathy for the Flemish Movement. Nonetheless, these sentiments were less outspoken than those expressed in the third of the most important popular dailies published in this period, namely *Het Laatste Nieuws* (°1888). Although this progressive liberal newspaper counted the Liberal mayor of Brussels and a Liberal senator among its founders, it soon gained autonomy from the Liberal Party after its prime animating force, the Flemish militant Julius Hoste, obtained exclusive ownership and full control over the editorial staff.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 321-325.

⁶⁷⁹ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 328-335.

⁶⁸⁰ DE BENS, *De Pers in België*, 248, 287-288, 309, 313, and 322-323; VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 120-129.

Quite a few other Flemish language newspapers saw the light in the decades before the First World, and so did dailies written in French. Yet although the above overview of the Belgian press landscape cannot be exhaustive, it does account for a large majority of newspapers sold in this period and allows to draw a representative image of how Belgian diplomats were portrayed by their country's journalists.⁶⁸¹ Given the independence of many Belgian newspaper and the slight over-representation (in comparison with the Catholic predominance in parliament) of the journalists and editors with Liberal sympathies, it could be expected that also with regards to the government's foreign policy executives, the press constituted a counterbalance for the government.

The next section investigates how journalists and newspaper editors perceived Belgian diplomats and diplomacy in the years before 1895. Because the number of Belgian dailies of this period that have been digitized with OCR is rather small, thorough scrutiny in this section will be limited to the French language newspapers *Le Journal de Bruxelles* (1887-1895), *L'Indépendance belge* (1887-1895), *Le Peuple* (1885-1895), and of course *Le Soir* (1887-1895), and to the Flemish dailies *Het Laatste Nieuws* (1893-1895), *Het Nieuws van den Dag* (1893-1895), and *Vooruit* (1885-1895). However, to obtain a fuller picture also some other, regional newspaper have been taken into account.

§ 2. Press Representations Before 1895

The Depiction of Belgian Diplomats

Bob's late April 1891 editorial in *Le Soir* contains some interesting views on Belgian diplomats and deserves to be looked at more closely. The title "Our consuls" leads one to suspect that its main theme is not diplomats. Yet more than half of the article deals not with Belgium's economic representatives in foreign cities but with the country's political agents abroad. Bob started out to evaluate the work of Belgian consuls but quickly came to the conclusion that their activities were not satisfactory due to "their dream to become regarded as diplomats" and to act accordingly. As we have seen, Bob showed his readers what these actions comprised in the case of a "seasoned diplomat". He also shed his light on the professional activities of junior diplomats, claiming that they "only serve for representing their country – albeit with distinction – in cotillions and in the world of binging." In Bob's experience, these were things that taxpayers did not benefit from, which led him to state that

⁶⁸¹ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, Chapter four.

diplomats were grossly overpaid for what they contributed. In addition to the questions what diplomats did and what they were paid for it, the journalist of *Le Soir* told his readers what diplomats should be doing to make their salaries worthwhile, that is strengthening Belgium's economic power. Yet, he regretted, "our diplomats cannot mingle with the world of affairs, for fear of compromising their social status." As we have seen, Bob ended his editorial spurring readers to think about what services diplomats rendered to the country. His answer was clear: none.⁶⁸²

A few years before Radical Liberals like Prosper Hanrez and Social Democrats such as Anseele provoked their more conservative colleagues in the Chamber by depicting Belgian diplomats as useless, overpaid, elitist and offensive, collaborators of *Le Soir* had provided them with imagery to pepper their speeches.⁶⁸³ However, unlike Anseele and Hanrez, these journalists did not plead for the abolishment of the Belgian diplomatic corps; they made recommendations for improving its effectiveness instead. One journalist, writing in June 1893, suggested to replace the diplomatic exam with an internship at a consulate or a Legation, or at least to submit both aspiring consuls and future diplomats to the same examinations. He also criticized the government for accepting only candidates with a bachelor's degree in Letters and Philosophy, and advised to allow all university graduates to the diplomatic exam.⁶⁸⁴

Also journalists of several other Belgian newspapers appear to have agreed with most of Bob's criticisms of Belgian diplomats. In the years before 1895, the Socialist Party's dailies *Le Peuple* and *Vooruit* devoted little attention to these persons but when they did, their journalists highlighted their alleged uselessness and offensively elevated salaries.⁶⁸⁵ The progressive liberal Flemish newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws* wrote even less about the country's diplomatic representatives. The few articles about Belgian diplomats published in 1894 framed them in much the same way as Bob and his colleagues from *Le Soir* did, albeit with a little more emphasis on the salaries that diplomats arguably did not deserve. Also, the tone was much harsher.

In an editorial published in March 1894, 'Zweepmans' (*Whip-man*) referred to Belgian diplomats as "these misters who are groping about, elbow-deep, in the treasury." Criticising

⁶⁸² BOB, "Nos consuls".

⁶⁸³ Mostly, however, these criticisms were formulated in a less explicit manner. See for instance PICCOLO, "La Semaine", *Le Soir*, 17 March 1890; and ANONYMOUS, "Petite Gazette – Le Téléphone Hollando-Belge", *Le Soir*, 28 November 1894.

⁶⁸⁴ ANONYMOUS, "Petite Gazette – Les Consulats", *Le Soir*, 7 June 1893.

⁶⁸⁵ ANONYMOUS, "Alle man soldaat en paters ook!", *Vooruit*, 20 November 1886; PASSE-PARTOUT, "Ca et là", *Le Peuple*, 26 August 1889; VOLDERS, Jean, "La danse des millions", *Le Peuple*, 20 November 1891; ANONYMOUS, "Le métier de diplomates", *Le Peuple*, 26 November 1894.

the limited access to the diplomatic career, Zweepmans, which was most likely the pseudonym of the newspaper's owner Julius Hoste, claimed to know that "generally rich kids, noble little jumpers, men with overblown titles and endless names get these grossly overpaid posts", while "boys from the people who have studied hard [...], have a firm knowledge of languages and commerce and could do the greatest and most invaluable services to our industrialists and merchants [...] are not elevated to these postings." This passage not only separates diplomats from the people by opposing them to "boys from the people", it also shows that journalists of *Het Laatste Nieuws* went further than those of *Le Soir* in commenting on the uselessness of diplomats. The former indeed ascribed the diplomats' lack of economic activity to their desire to uphold their social status. Zweepmans, for one, believed that diplomats were simply incapable of defending their country's economic interests. He stated that they were essentially "petty men who are very competent to move in high society, but do not have the least understanding of the requirements of their profession." To support his argument, Zweepmans invoked the example of Belgian economic interests in Argentina that diplomats, in his opinion, had very poorly defended, which had consequently cost Belgian investors large sums of money.⁶⁸⁶

A few months later, Zweepmans's colleagues pursued his incapability thesis a little further and tried to demonstrate the diplomats' lack of negotiating skills. In an editorial of late May 1894, another journalist argued that Belgian diplomats had repeatedly been lifted in negotiations with their British counterparts concerning the Congo Free State, while yet another journalist of *Het Laatste Nieuws* claimed that the same had happened in diplomatic dealings with the French.⁶⁸⁷ For Zweepmans, "radical reforms in the appointment of our diplomats" were badly needed, and "men who [...] neglect in such an outrageous manner the functions that they are so lavishly paid for [...] should be kicked out with no mercy!" Zweepmans concluded his editorial stating that "this, too, will be the job of the future Chambers, elected by universal suffrage."⁶⁸⁸ In other words, a useless and overpaid diplomatic corps composed of incompetent aristocrats who were elevated above the people might have been tolerated in a bourgeois state with limited suffrage but in times of

⁶⁸⁶ ZWEEP MANS, "Onze vertegenwoordigers IN DEN VREEMDE", *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 13 March 1894. As for Zweepmans' true identity, Julius Hoste's first publication was a weekly named *De Zweep* (The Whip). See GUBIN, Eliane, *Bruxelles au XIXème siècle: berceau d'un flamingantisme démocratique (1840-1873)*, Brussels, 1979, 428-434.

⁶⁸⁷ KEREL, "Een Afrikaansch wespennest", *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 30 May 1894; ANONYMOUS, "Belgische diplomaten", *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 19 August 1894.

⁶⁸⁸ ZWEEP MANS, "Onze vertegenwoordigers".

democratization the delegates of the people would no longer accept this anomaly. At least, that is what Zweepmans hoped.

Bob shared Zweepmans's idea that Belgian diplomats stood outside of the people but attributed this exclusion less to their aristocratic quality and rather to their physical detachment from the nation. Arguing that "these misters" sometimes spent decades abroad, he complained that "they do not know their country well anymore and are strangers when they happen to pass by." So, he continued, "how can they acquire a clear notion of our *interests* and of what *interests* us?" According to Bob, the solution would be that diplomats "stay amongst us at least one out of every three years, to not forget us, us and our industry."⁶⁸⁹ These comments bear some resemblance with the discourse of the Christian Democrat Alphonse Nothomb during the 1895 foreign budget discussions in parliament, with the difference that Bob did not go as far as to suggest the replacement of diplomats by politicians. He also rendered the organic view of the nation, so striking in Nothomb's intervention, less explicit than the Catholic MP did. The similarities with Nothomb's speech are primarily situated in the opposition between 'us' (arguably the Belgian nation) and 'them' (Belgian diplomats) that Bob introduces in his article. He identifies them as "these misters" and as "strangers" and thus puts them outside of the community that he and his readers belong to. Nevertheless, Bob still seems to believe that no irreparable damage has been done; prolonged stays in their home country could bring diplomats back in touch with the nation and its needs. Perhaps Bob's search for an inclusive solution had to do with his awareness that a certain congruity of ideas existed between the members of the Belgian diplomatic corps and the collaborators of *Le Soir*. As one of his colleagues had pointed out a few months earlier, diplomats were "absolutely indifferent to our party-political struggles."⁶⁹⁰ Transcending these threats to Belgian unity was very dear to *Le Soir*'s editorial staff.

As the examples provided so far illustrate, Belgian diplomats did not receive a good press in the years surrounding the extensions of the franchise. However, despite the fact that *Le Soir* had quickly grown to become the most widely distributed Belgian newspaper and *Het Laatste Nieuws* was the best sold Flemish language daily in this period, their political weight remained as yet fairly limited. Both were young newspapers which had owed their popularity to lower sections of the population that bought these papers primarily for the soft news and

⁶⁸⁹ BOB, "Nos consuls".

⁶⁹⁰ ANONYMOUS, "Petite Gazette", *Le Soir*, 17 November 1890.

blood-and-thunder stories they contained.⁶⁹¹ *Het Laatste Nieuws* had an extra disadvantage in that the great majority of national politicians did not read Flemish.⁶⁹²

The political establishment favoured other newspapers, such as *L'Indépendance belge* and the Catholic government's unofficial voice *Le Journal de Bruxelles*. These journals passed far more positive judgments on Belgian diplomats.⁶⁹³ Covering stories about the country's diplomatic agents, *L'Indépendance belge* tended to select those that stressed the honour bestowed upon them and often accompanied their names with words of praise. As we have seen in chapter three, in his memoirs Pierre Orts was very critical about the inactivity of Baron Auguste d'Anethan, whom he served at the Paris legation in the late 1890s. In an article published in *L'Indépendance belge*, by contrast, d'Anethan was called "one of the most loved and esteemed diplomats," while another article in the same journal described how the Dutch queen had praised d'Anethan for his tact and for the successes he obtained in strengthening the friendship between Belgium and the Netherlands.⁶⁹⁴

The latter commendations were reprinted the next day in the Liberal daily *La Meuse*, which targeted a readership of industrialists from the province of Liège.⁶⁹⁵ Journalists of *La Meuse* did not limit themselves to positive coverage of Belgian diplomats. They also actively tried, albeit implicitly, to counter negative representations of the country's diplomatic representatives declaimed in parliament or printed in other journals. In March 1894, a journalist from *La Meuse* discussed a report on commercial relations between Belgium and Switzerland written by Joseph Jooris, the Belgian minister plenipotentiary in Bern. This report, he concluded, proved that "some diplomats ... do care about the interests of our exporters."⁶⁹⁶ A year and a half later, the public of *La Meuse* could experience that the tone of arguments in favour of Belgian diplomats had become more militant. After describing his stay at the Belgian legation in London, a journalist from *La Meuse* exclaimed: "That one no longer pretends, out of ignorance, I suppose, that all our diplomats are mere pleasure-seekers!" He continued arguing that "if they are people from a better world, they do not possess less knowledge and a great experience in issues of foreign policy."⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹¹ VAN DEN DUNGEN, "Milieux de presse", 125-126 and 148-149.

⁶⁹² BITSCH, *La Belgique*, 274.

⁶⁹³ In the case of *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, see for instance ANONYMOUS, "Lettre des Pays-Bas", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 17 February 1893 and 24 December 1894.

⁶⁹⁴ ANONYMOUS, "Au jour le jour. Echos de la ville", *L'Indépendance belge*, 31 December 1893 and 15

August 1895. See also the same section in *L'Indépendance belge* of 28 April 1888 and 7 and 29 December 1894.

⁶⁹⁵ ANONYMOUS, "Le nouveau ministre de Belgique à Paris", *La Meuse*, 16 August 1894. For *La Meuse*, see LAMBRETTE, Denise, *Le journal La Meuse, 1855-1955*, Leuven, 1969; and DE BENS, *De Pers in België*, 360.

⁶⁹⁶ ANONYMOUS, "Le commerce extérieur de la Suisse et son commerce spécial avec la Belgique. Rapport de M. Jooris, ministre de Belgique à Berne", *La Meuse*, 15 March 1894.

⁶⁹⁷ ANONYMOUS, "Le Congrès international de la coopération", *La Meuse*, 28 August 1895.

Published less than two months after Anseele's attacks on Belgian diplomats during the plenary session of the Chamber in early July 1895, this article reveals that the interventions of the Social Democrats in parliament had clearly impacted on more conservative opinion makers. As the government's unofficial voice, *Le Journal de Bruxelles* was well-prepared to counter such attacks on the diplomats' dignity. Scrutinizing the progressive Liberal press since many years, journalists of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* regularly entered into dialogue with their ideological enemies. Especially *La Réforme* got it in the neck. In early 1890, this progressive liberal newspaper published an article naming Baron Jules Greindl "a salon diplomat" and Baron Auguste Lambermont "a diplomat of the King". A journalist of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* immediately reacted by mocking *La Réforme* for its ignorance and by ridiculing the diplomatic qualities of the progressive newspaper's editors.⁶⁹⁸

The previous chapter has shown that earlier interventions of Radical Liberals and Social Democrats during the Chamber's plenary and section sessions in 1894 had caused polemics between the editors of *La Réforme*, who attacked Belgian diplomats, and those of *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, who energetically conducted the diplomats' defence. The apologies published in *Le Journal de Bruxelles* illustrate the impact that the Radical Liberals had made in the months after the 1893 extension of the franchise. A journalist of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* fiercely attacked Prosper Hanrez, Louis Richald and Auguste Lambiotte, the Radical Liberals who had criticised Belgian diplomats during the plenary foreign budget discussions in February 1894. The journalist denounced "the indecency and the ignorance of these ill-bred democrats" and feared that their aspirations went further than the abolishment of the Belgian diplomatic corps: "After having wanted to suppress diplomacy, ... after having wanted to take away from our country the rank that it so honourably holds in the official world of all the great nations, our unruly democrats undoubtedly dream of diminishing what makes us great, our respectability at home. Already they set themselves to ridicule and discredit the nobility. Soon they will not fail to lend their hands to their occasional allies, the revolutionary socialists, to demand the abolition of the monarchy." The journalist of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* used several more derivatives of democracy in his article, all in a negative vein.⁶⁹⁹

Marnix Beyen and Henk te Velde have argued that in the late nineteenth century the concept of democracy carried far more positive connotations among Belgian parliamentarians than among their Dutch colleagues, due to the discourse of democracy that the founders of the

⁶⁹⁸ ANONYMOUS, "Chronique du jour. La diplomatie radicale", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 6 March 1890.

⁶⁹⁹ ANONYMOUS, "Autour d'un budget", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 26 February 1894.

Belgian state resorted to in order to legitimate their secession of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. Of course, this does not exclude the existence of a large group of anti-democrats both within and outside of parliament.⁷⁰⁰ The above journalist of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* was clearly one of them. His comments illustrate how conservative political forces at least temporarily had many difficulties coping with the challenges that democracy entailed, and this might have made them appreciate the values of democracies a little less. Like the progressive parliamentarians whom he reprehended, the journalist of the Catholic government's unofficial paper seems to have equated 'Belgian diplomats' with 'aristocrats'. Yet while Radical Liberals deducted from this equation that diplomats were the offensive symbols of an undemocratic political entity, the journalist of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* saw Belgium's official representatives in foreign capitals as constituting elements of the Belgian state as he wished to preserve it.

In any case, *Le Journal de Bruxelles*'s reprehension of Hanrez, Richald and Lambiotte adds some perspective to Zweepmans's editorial in *Het Laatste Nieuws*. Discussing the same parliamentary speeches in March 1894, Zweepmans was actually conducting the defence of the Radical Liberals when he concluded that the Chambers elected by universal suffrage had to take action to radically reform the conditions of access to diplomatic postings. This seems to have been a reply to what his colleague of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* had written barely two weeks earlier.

Belgian dailies such as *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Le Soir* drew fairly detailed portraits of Belgian diplomats. These portraits often provided interesting scenes from diplomatic landscapes as well, revealing how their journalists pictured what they believed was happening on the Diplomatic Island and which mores and codes reigned in that secluded territory. Hardly ever mentioning the names of individual diplomats, they pictured the Belgian diplomatic corps as a generic entity whose parts shared the same characteristics. The more democratic – in terms of sales price and contents – newspapers had far less access to the world of Belgian diplomats than the press organs affiliated with the political establishment, which in the decade before 1895 still largely consisted of liberal Catholics and doctrinaire Liberals. Newspapers like *Le Journal de Bruxelles* and *L'Indépendance belge* wrote more about Belgian diplomats and pictured them differently, singling out individual diplomats and praising them for their services to the country.

⁷⁰⁰ BEYEN and TE VELDE, "Modern parliaments".

Yet the greater proximity to the Belgian diplomatic corps also made the editors of the more conservative newspapers consider the diplomats' political affiliations differently. While *Le Soir* pictured them as politically apathetic and as standing outside of the nation, *Le Journal de Bruxelles* included them as part of the domestic political world and sometimes made clear distinctions between Catholic and Liberal diplomats.⁷⁰¹ *La Meuse* did the same. It is indeed no coincidence that in arguing that *some* diplomats did promote Belgium's commerce and *not all* diplomats were pleasure seekers, the Liberal journal from Liège invoked the example of Joseph Jooris, a diplomat with a Liberal cachet.⁷⁰²

La Gazette de Charleroi, the unofficial voice of the doctrinaire Liberals in the province of Hainaut, adopted a more militant stance. In August 1891, one of its journalists vented his displeasure with an article published in a Catholic journal that jibed at a Liberal legation attaché who had failed his diplomatic exam. The journalist countered with an example of a Catholic junior diplomat who had done worse but had nonetheless been promoted by the Catholic government to serve the country as secretary at the coveted legation in Paris.⁷⁰³ The same frustration with the Catholic take-over of the government, and thus at least partly of the admittance policy to the diplomatic career, had inspired another of *La Gazette de Charleroi*'s journalists to devote a satiric piece to Belgian diplomacy under the heading of "Carnival". The journalist described the Belgian Foreign Ministry as a carnival float whose draught horses moved forward "performing various dances in line with the caprices of the artist." According to the journalist, this artist was the Catholic Foreign Minister Prince Joseph Riquet de Caraman-Chimay, who conducted the float while playing the violin so harmoniously that it seemed as if "the magic power of Orpheus's lyre had passed to his violin." Behind the float, the journalist continued, "a horde of dandies from the high aristocracy performed, to the strains of the ministerial violin, the same dances as the horses in front."⁷⁰⁴ Identifying these dancers as Belgium's future diplomats, the journalist suggested that the Catholic government's take-over of diplomacy would lead many young aristocrats, who traditionally supported the Catholic Party, to enter the diplomatic career, which in the long run allegedly harmed the interests of the Liberal Party's electorate.

⁷⁰¹ See for instance ANONYMOUS, "Chronique du jour. La diplomatie radicale", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 6 March 1890.

⁷⁰² Joseph Jooris came from a Liberal family from Bruges, where his brother Emile served as a municipal councillor for the Liberal Party. See EPNB, 1991, 262-265; and HOUTHOOFD, S., *Beknopte biografie van Emile Jooris*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Universiteit Gent, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 1988.

⁷⁰³ ANONYMOUS, "Les fruits-secs cléricaux", *La Gazette de Charleroi*, 1 August 1891.

⁷⁰⁴ ANONYMOUS, "Chronique locale. Carnaval", *La Gazette de Charleroi*, 20 February 1887.

The Depiction of Diplomacy

The theme of Carnival allowed the newspaper's journalist to criticize the ways of Belgian diplomacy. Characterized by parodic elements and disregard of social convention, Carnival was about ambiguity, a playful combination of revealing and concealing.⁷⁰⁵ As the journalist wrote, "huge curtains completely masque what is cooking inside the ministry" and "on its curtains is written in big letters: *Foreign Affairs. Here we deliver eventful situations. Absolute discretion guaranteed.*" Nevertheless, the journalist then suggested, occasionally people who watched the float passing by could discern a few dressed up figures, or so it seemed: "From time to time, one can see a hand faintly opening the curtains, and something shows itself. One time it is the point of a Prussian helmet, another time the nose of M. [Charles] de Lalaing, or even the full budded grin of a naïve Makoko [a pre-colonial Congolese prince]. At a certain moment the wind brusquely removes the curtains and one vaguely distinguishes, in the obscurity of the heavy drapes, a papal paunch conquered by a tiara." Yet, the journalist appeared to regret: "it never takes long before the curtains are closed again."⁷⁰⁶

Indirectly, the journalist denounced the secretive ways of Belgian diplomacy. As we have seen in the previous chapter, throughout the late nineteenth century Belgian parliamentarians had regularly asked for access to the country's diplomatic documents. After the Social Democrats had entered the Chamber and the Senate in the mid-1890s these polite and half-hearted requests turned into vigorous pleas for an open diplomacy, which required negotiations conducted under the supervision of parliament and the press, and the establishment of international arbitration. According to the more progressive voices in parliament, this was the only way to preserve peace in Europe.

Most Belgian journalists agreed. Especially the notion of arbitration was widely applauded, also in the more conservative newspapers. In June 1893, the private correspondent of *La Meuse* in London described the motion adopted by the House of Commons to conclude an arbitration treaty with the United States as "a first step towards the realisation of this utopia of today that will be the truth of tomorrow: universal peace." *La Meuse's* correspondent filled the rest of his article fulminating against militarism, which he attributed to "the racial egoism that constitutes this parody of patriotism that forms the stuff of the protests of these great political geniuses, of these profound diplomats who authored the plague, who created the Europe in arms." Yet, the correspondent believed, the masses would no longer accept these practices: "We do not believe for an instant that the motives that have justified militarism [in

⁷⁰⁵ JACKSON, P., "Street life: the politics of Carnival", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 6/2, 1988, 213 – 227.

⁷⁰⁶ ANONYMOUS, "Chronique locale. Carnaval", *La Gazette de Charleroi*, 20 February 1887.

the past] will not be considered otherwise than with horror and contempt by these masses, who will show themselves more sensible, more humanitarian and more civilised than those who govern them.”⁷⁰⁷ A few years later, a journalist of *L'Indépendance belge* argued that over the previous decade the idea of international arbitration had become ever more accepted. He warmly welcomed this development, and even apologised to his readers for “not defending it more energetically in this newspaper.” It had become so obvious to support arbitration, he argued, that he feared that doing so more often would come across as trite. However, this did not refrain him from repeating that “a new state of mind” had established itself, and that “diplomats would commit a stupidity if they were to deny that.”⁷⁰⁸

It could very well be that Charles de Broqueville, the Catholic MP who little more than a year later pleaded for Belgian parliamentary initiatives in matters of international arbitration, had read these or similar articles expressing the same opinions. In parliament, as we have seen, Broqueville strained himself to reassure diplomats that arbitration posed no threat to their profession. Reading articles such as those in *La Meuse* and *L'Indépendance belge* might indeed have made them feel otherwise. In these articles, diplomats were characterized as opponents of these new forms of diplomacy. Admittedly, the journalist of *L'Indépendance belge* assumed a much milder attitude than the correspondent of *La Meuse*, who portrayed tribunals of arbitration as creators of peace and diplomats as the exact opposite, namely as authors of war. It is hard to believe that this imagery came from preconceptions of *Belgian* diplomats. Criticisms of the country's diplomatic representatives generally concerned their alleged lack of initiative and negotiating skills, and suspicions that they only cared for dining, dancing, and spending lavishly.

Representations of diplomats as war-mongers seem to have referred to diplomats who actually negotiated about war and peace, and thus primarily to representatives of the non-neutral nations that dominated the European political landscape in the decades before the First World War. Such imagery could be found in Belgian newspapers of different political denominations, although much less frequently in the more conservative press organs.⁷⁰⁹ In the years before 1895, *Le Peuple* published several articles that opposed the peacefulness of the people to the bellicosity of diplomats in much the same way as the correspondent of *La Meuse* did. The message its editors wanted to convey was that “the more diplomats incite the peoples

⁷⁰⁷ XX, “L'arbitrage international”, *La Meuse*, 22 June 1893.

⁷⁰⁸ ANONYMOUS, “Echos de partout. Arbitrage”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 23 December 1895.

⁷⁰⁹ In addition to the arbitration article in *La Meuse*, I have only found one reference to diplomats as troublemakers in a serialized novel published by *L'Indépendance belge*. See TALMEYR, Maurice, “Supplément littéraire. Rochefort”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 25 August 1895.

against each other, the more the workers of all the countries, without distinction of nationality, have to lend each other their hands.”⁷¹⁰ Collaborators of *Le Soir* focused less on what the workers, and the peoples in general, ought to do to counter the hawkish actions of diplomats, but condemned these deeds with the same vigour.⁷¹¹

Representations of diplomats as war-mongers sprung at least partly from the secretive nature of their professional activities. People who occupied themselves with activities that could not be brought to light must have been morally reprehensible persons, so the underlying reasoning seems to have been. Hence also the recurrent depictions in some Belgian newspapers of diplomats as liars, cheaters, and sly foxes.⁷¹² However, most journalists seem to have agreed that it was inaccurate to apply this imagery to Belgian diplomats, who were primarily denounced for their inactivity and incompetence. As such, it would have been more likely that their ability to keep war away from Belgium was questioned. In times when the threat of war was felt less acutely than a decade later, journalists did not yet do so.

§ 3. Journalists vs. Diplomats

In any case, the unflattering image that neutral and leftist Belgian newspapers created of the country’s diplomats did not seem to have elicited much reaction from the latter. At least, the relative absence in diplomats’ personnel files of press cuttings and comments on newspaper articles from this period leads one to suspect that this is the case. But did diplomats actually read the newspapers that put them in a bad light. And if they did, did they care? *Le Peuple* was the press organ of the – among the country’s elite – much vilified Belgian Workers Party while *Le Soir* was widely distributed but in its early years remained a penny press newspaper with little political influence. The fiercest attacks on the diplomats’ dignity came from *Het Laatste Nieuws*, yet most diplomats did not read Flemish, let alone that they would deign to interact with a popular daily closely associated with the Flemish movement. More importantly, they still received positive media coverage from the journals that persons from their own social circles did read, such as *Le Journal de Bruxelles* and *L’Indépendance belge*.

⁷¹⁰ ANONYMOUS, “Ca et là”, *Le Peuple*, 24 December 1886. See also VOLDERS, Jean, “Pas de fumée sans feu”, *Le Peuple*, 6 October 1888; and ANONYMOUS, “Le province. Dans le centre”, *Le Peuple*, 10 December 1890.

⁷¹¹ See for instance GANGE, René, “Sang humain”, *Le Soir*, 21 November 1893; ANONYMOUS, “Chronique Parisienne. Guillaume II à Paris”, *Le Soir*, 18 October 1894; and PICCOLO [alias editor in chief Auguste Cauvin, generally called d’Arsac], “La semaine”, *Le Soir*, 7 October 1895.

⁷¹² See for instance PICCOLO, “La semaine”, *Le Soir*, 16 January 1893 and 7 October 1895; ANONYMOUS, “Théâtres et Beaux-arts”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 21 March 1887; ANONYMOUS, “Het Engelsch-Russisch geschil”, *Vooruit*, 24 April 1885.

Le Journal de Bruxelles moreover often acted as the Foreign Ministry's voice and took the diplomats' defence when their dignity was at stake. It can also be argued that in the years before 1895, Belgian diplomats were not really confronted with the threat coming from the country's most critical journalists. Occasionally, these men certainly pleaded for radical reforms of both the Belgian diplomatic career and of diplomatic practice in general. For the time being, however, they still seemed prepared to leave diplomacy to the diplomats.

This was bound to change after the turn of the century. Taking 1905 as a sample year, we find that *Le Soir* and *Het Laatste Nieuws* still published articles that denounced the elevated salaries of Belgian diplomats and accused them of assuming elitist attitudes, manifesting incompetence in political negotiations and neglecting the country's commercial interests. Their journalists also continued to plead for more openness in diplomatic dealings between governments.⁷¹³ Added to this, however, they now explicitly demanded more respect from Belgian diplomats and claimed for themselves a higher degree of access to the world of diplomacy.

Encounters with junior diplomats at the funeral of Baron Lambert in March 1905 seem to have forged bonds of solidarity between journalists from different newspapers and provided them with the occasion to vent their joint frustrations. Invoking similar comments published in the Antwerp-based Liberal journal *Le Matin*, a collaborator of *Le Soir* complained about the "extraordinary arrogance" that "petty young people of the Department of Foreign Affairs" had shown towards the gathered journalists, forcing them to take place far away from the funeral ceremony so that they could not see what was being done nor hear what was being said. Since the press constituted "the only mediator between them and the great public", this journalist argued, such "disdain" was incomprehensible.⁷¹⁴ The journalist of *Het Laatste Nieuws* agreed and listed a few other colleagues, including Catholic ones, who had been treated rudely by the "gilded donkeys" of Foreign Affairs. In Brussels, the press rarely suffered indignity, he claimed, arguing that it only happened in encounters with "petty nobles of the Foreign Ministry who ... Oh God! are not even deemed capable of fulfilling a mission abroad." The journalist supported this argument by pointing out that Leopold II hardly ever used diplomats to send as confidants to countries outside of Europe: the King would have been careful not to call "these fashion dandies outside of their offices, their soirees, their balls and boudoirs." Consequently, the journalist argued, "our little knights,

⁷¹³ See for instance CALAS, "Diplomatie et commerce", *Le Soir*, 18 March 1905; PETRUCCI, R., "La Guerre et la Paix", *Le Soir*, 21 June 1905; and ANONYMOUS, "Diplomatische onhoffelijkheid", *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 12 March 1905.

⁷¹⁴ ANONYMOUS, "Petite Gazette. Pour les jeunes diplomates", 12 March 1905.

barons and counts” should better not beat the drum too hard. Instead, he continued, the diplomats’ job consisted in being courteous with everyone, even with “naughty creatures called journalists”. The correspondent of *Het Laatste Nieuws* argued that “this corps [journalists] has produced more than one deserving diplomat” and cited a handful of French diplomats who once shared his profession. “These boys from the people”, the journalist explained, “are of a different calibre than our noble snoopers who hide their nullity behind the garment of rudeness and moreover cost the country an arm and a leg.”⁷¹⁵

Judging from the examples of *Le Soir* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*, journalists had gained self-confidence in matters of diplomacy. It seemed as if some of them considered themselves to be better suited to represent their country than diplomats. Admittedly, the journalist of *Le Soir* showed a little more reluctance in this regard. His colleague of *Het Laatste Nieuws*, however, did not refrain from suggesting that the suitability of journalists to become diplomats sprung not only from their greater ability but also from their greater legitimacy to act as diplomatic representatives. He seems to have wondered how a state that cherished the principles of popular sovereignty could have its interests promoted by representatives who were alien to the people. Referring to prominent members of the French diplomatic corps which, as we have seen, counted in terms of percentage far less aristocrats in its ranks, this journalist indeed implicitly argued that also in a country like Belgium “boys from the people” should represent the nation, rather than those whose aristocratic quality excluded them from the community of the Belgian people.

The journals associated with the political establishment would certainly not go that far. Yet also Jean Bernard, the correspondent of *L’Indépendance belge* in Paris, agreed that journalists were “the diplomats of the masses”, and explained that “it belongs to them to negotiate the appeasement of ideas and the destruction of hate.”⁷¹⁶ In a similar vein, a journalist of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* acknowledged that his profession consisted in “discovering the secrets of diplomats, even when they are negotiating behind closed doors.”⁷¹⁷

Such conceptions of journalistic duties did not imply journalists taking the diplomats’ place but did argue for journalists entering the world of diplomacy as independent actors who closely surveyed the activities of diplomats. Belgian journalists must have felt in a legitimate position to do so. For one, their profile as a social professional group was much more ‘democratic’ in comparison with diplomats, or at least journalists tended to come from wider

⁷¹⁵ ANONYMOUS, “Diplomatische onhoffelijkheid”.

⁷¹⁶ BERNARD, Jean, “France. La vie à Paris”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 29 November 1905.

⁷¹⁷ CH., “La politique étrangère. Vers la paix”, *Journal de Bruxelles*, 13 August 1905.

sections of the Belgian population. Taking those who made a living writing for newspapers as a criterion, it seems that journalists were recruited predominantly from bourgeois circles. A little less than three out of ten had fathers who were journalists themselves, while a little more than four out of ten came from merchant and artisan families. Less than two out of ten had fathers who worked in the civil service. The remaining ones came from very different social backgrounds, including jurists, industrialists and workers.⁷¹⁸ For another, journalists will also have felt themselves intellectually capable enough to report the activities of diplomats and to understand the ways of diplomacy. About half of them went to university and only one out of every five did not finish high school. Taking into account only those who went to university, the educational profiles of journalists were not that different from those of diplomats. Both counted about six out of ten jurists, followed at some distance by students of Letters and Philosophy.⁷¹⁹ However, unlike most diplomats, most journalists had not pursued their studies at the Catholic University of Louvain but rather at the Free University of Brussels. Less than a third of all Belgian journalists defined themselves as politically Catholic. This means that more than two thirds felt more sympathy for the political parties that constituted the opposition. It even seems that progressive Liberal and Socialist journalists made up an equally large group as their Catholic colleagues.⁷²⁰ As such, most Belgian journalists might have been extra stimulated to take a critical stance in their writings about Belgian diplomacy and its conservative executors.

In the decades before the First World War the strongly heterogeneous and energetically growing European newspaper press became more and more aware of its power. The social forces that, in the name of the people, had demanded access to the public sphere throughout the nineteenth century now aimed at the realm of international politics, foreign policy having become increasingly determined by domestic political themes and power relations. Newspapers functioned as one of the most important mouthpieces of these forces and compelled diplomats to reckon with their view that matters of diplomacy could no longer be left to the judgment of a small, anachronistic elite. In essentially two different ways, journalists began to set themselves up as the ambassadors of democracy. On the one hand, journalists from different countries voiced the principle of the peoples' inherent pacifism and desire to work together. This attitude helped to forge a cosmopolitan esprit de corps among foreign reporters. On the other hand, nationalism competed with internationalism and many of

⁷¹⁸ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieu de presse*, 362-363.

⁷¹⁹ For diplomats, see ADCB, 1910, 137-171. For journalists, see VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieu de presse*, 366-367.

⁷²⁰ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieu de presse*, 371

these reporters often regarded themselves as representatives of the nations that they felt part of, rather than as objective correspondents.⁷²¹ Journalists who adhered to the nationalist paradigm tended to defend what they believed to be their country's interests with the same vigour as diplomats. However, the difference was that they generally adopted a much harsher tone and their discussions did not transpire behind closed doors. Hostile newspaper articles and critical press comments and cartoons increasingly caused friction in relations between states. This made many European diplomats and their Foreign Ministries aware that effective press management was urgently needed.⁷²²

§ 4. Diplomats vs. Journalists

The Foreign Ministry's Dealings with the Press

The impact of public opinion on foreign policy certainly differed according to the social and political constellations of the various European states.⁷²³ Yet in liberal democracies such as France, Germany and Great-Britain, the diplomatic establishment had to take into account the growing interest of the public in foreign affairs and the power of the public's voice in influencing foreign governments.⁷²⁴ Dominik Geppert has compared how the German and British Foreign Ministries dealt with the press between 1890 and 1914, a period of rising tensions between both countries. Since the time of Bismarck, the German Foreign Ministry had adopted a bureaucratic approach, charging officials to scrutinize foreign and domestic newspapers and instructing junior diplomats in the *Reich's* embassies and legations to do the same with the press in their host countries. To influence domestic public opinion, the Ministry sponsored some newspapers and exercised repression on others, but also granted rewards and distinctions to individual journalists that were deemed worthy of the selective information the Ministry's press service disclosed. Positively affecting the British press caused German diplomats much more difficulties, mainly because of its financial independence and its publication speed. Moreover, attempts to charm British journalists generally failed and actually heightened suspicion. Conversely, the British Foreign Ministry did not manage to win over German correspondents either. According to Geppert, British diplomatic officials

⁷²¹ GEPPERT, Dominik, "The Public Challenge to Diplomacy : German and British Ways of Dealing with the Press, 1890-1914", in MÖSSLANG and RIOTTE (eds.), *The Diplomats' World*, 133-139 and 164.

⁷²² BLACK, Jeremy, *A History of Diplomacy*, 166-169.

⁷²³ HAMILTON and LANGHORNE, *The Practice of Diplomacy*, 124.

⁷²⁴ HUCKER, "International History and the Study of Public Opinion", 780.

looked down on German journalists, who generally came from lower strata of society, and refrained from interacting with them. They could do so because the British Foreign Ministry had not institutionalized dealings with the press, foreign nor domestic, relying instead on personal contacts and social networking in clubs and universities. This more subtle approach did work in relations with domestic journalists, many of whom shared both political beliefs and social backgrounds of the men who directed British foreign policy.⁷²⁵

Geppert claims that the German rather than the British method of press management seems to have been common practice in most European Foreign Ministries, as also the Viennese, Roman and Parisian diplomatic establishments adopted the bureaucratic approach.⁷²⁶ The Belgian case was different. The Foreign Ministry in Brussels did not establish a section responsible for relations with journalists before the First World War. However, this does not mean that its officials did not take such establishment into consideration. In early 1905, the Political Direction undertook to study how the Department had traditionally dealt with the press.⁷²⁷ Evaluating the results at the end of the same year Secretary-General Van der Elst noted that he had told the Political Director many times that the Foreign Ministry needed an international organ that could rectify “bad ideas about matters that regard our country.”⁷²⁸ Arendt somewhat evasively responded that “at our Department it is tradition that relations with the Press are reserved to the Cabinet of Mister Minister.” Arendt wished to keep it that way and wanted to avoid at all costs that journalists could just walk in the offices of the Directions asking for “bits of news”. Only the Cabinet can decide what to say to journalists and take the responsibility for it, Arendt repeated. The Political Director refused to examine the matter of “using the press, like in the great countries, to publish appreciations of the political acts of the Department, and thus guide opinions.” In Belgium, he stated, “this has not been done so far.”⁷²⁹

Arendt greatly valued the traditions of the Belgian Foreign Ministry, and wished to preserve them. The rigid conception of neutrality that had dominated the diplomatic establishment’s mind-set for many decades led him to act with extremely reluctance in

⁷²⁵ GEPPERT, “The Public Challenge to Diplomacy”, 139-152. For a similar but less substantial discussion of British diplomatic press management, see STEINER, *The Foreign Office*, 186-191.

⁷²⁶ GEPPERT, “The Public Challenge to Diplomacy”, 163-164. Jeremy Black points out that the French Foreign Ministry had already created a section responsible for reporting on the foreign press in 1886. See BLACK, *A History of Diplomacy*, 167.

⁷²⁷ AMBZ, Classement B, 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Rappports avec la Presse, 1896-1913, Léon Arendt to Léon van der Elst, 27 January 1905.

⁷²⁸ AMBZ, Classement B, 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Rappports avec la Presse, 1896-1913, Léon van der Elst to Léon Arendt, 5 October 1905.

⁷²⁹ AMBZ, Classement B, 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Rappports avec la Presse, 1896-1913, Note of Direction P, 6 October 1905.

relations with the press. Surely, a certain degree of mistrust also affected his attitude. Arendt must have realized that many journalists did not share his view of how diplomacy should be practiced. When a newspaper from Paris asked the Belgian government to accept Jean Bernard as its new reporter on relations between Belgium and France, the Political Director refused to reply and instructed the legation in Paris not to give Bernard any information. “M. Jean Bernard is a journalist who should not be trusted,” Arendt explained.⁷³⁰ Bernard was also the journalist who had suggested in *L’Indépendance belge* that as “diplomats of the masses”, journalists were better suited than diplomats to keep the peace.

However, as tensions were rising between Belgium’s eastern and southern neighbours and this increasingly affected the editorial staffs of Belgian newspapers, Arendt was forced to approach the Department’s dealings with the press a bit more pragmatically. He knew that both German and French diplomats in Brussels went to some lengths to influence Belgian public opinion, using their tested methods of sponsoring newspapers, or at least trying to, and awarding distinctions to journalists. He also knew that these diplomats were extremely sensitive about what Belgian journals published about their home countries.⁷³¹ According to Jean Stengers, the Foreign Ministry had always replied to their complaints that nothing could be done because freedom of the press was inscribed in the Belgian Constitution. In reality, Stengers argues, the Belgian foreign budget was too tight to sponsor domestic newspapers.⁷³² Yet if this was the case, Marie-Thérèse Bitsch argues, it did not prevent Arendt from having *Le Journal de Bruxelles* publish articles that rebutted criticisms of the German government in the Francophile press, which comprised most French language Liberal newspapers and notably *L’Indépendance belge*. Founding her argument exclusively on a selection of the political correspondence of the German minister plenipotentiary in Brussels published by the nationalist historian Jacques Willequet, Bitsch also claims that in the decade before the First World War *Le Journal de Bruxelles* adopted an invariably positive stance towards the *Reich* and suggests that the newspaper was under full government control.⁷³³

This is not entirely true. For one, the Political Direction regularly had difficulties with indiscretions published by *Le Journal de Bruxelles*. In late October 1908, a quarrel arose between *Le Journal de Bruxelles* and the French newspaper *L’Echo de Paris*, which led Arendt to reflect about the Ministry’s press policy. “When a foreign minister comes to

⁷³⁰ AMBZ, Classement B, 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Rapports avec la Presse, 1896-1913, Note of Direction P, 24 February 1909.

⁷³¹ BITSCH, *La Belgique*, 274-283; VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieux de presse*, 463-467.

⁷³² STENGERS, “Le cas de la Belgique”, 32-33.

⁷³³ BITSCH, *La Belgique*, 279-280.

complain about an article in the ‘unofficial journal’ *Le Journal de Bruxelles*,” Arendt explained, “we reply that the Government does not have an unofficial organ, that it sometimes publishes in *Le Journal de Bruxelles* easily recognisable announcements, but that it has nothing to do with the political direction of that journal.” Yet the sarcastic tone adopted by *Le Journal de Bruxelles* in a letter addressed to *L’Echo de Paris* caused Arendt more worries. He feared that the French Foreign Ministry would regard the journal’s demarche as inspired or even ordered by the Belgian government and found it necessary to urge the director of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* to make an end to the polemic. “By spontaneously appropriating the quality of the Government’s unofficial organ,” Arendt found, *Le Journal de Bruxelles* “directly makes the Government responsible [for its contents].”⁷³⁴

For another, *Le Journal de Bruxelles* more than once published articles that depicted the German authorities negatively. Only a few weeks after the *L’Echo de Paris* incident, *Le Journal de Bruxelles* ridiculed the German emperor William II because he had revealed top secret information about Germany’s diplomacy in the British press.⁷³⁵ Given the highly tensed diplomatic climate in Europe, Arendt claimed not to understand that “this is the moment when Belgian newspapers, and foremost the one that in the whole of Europe is regarded as the Government’s organ, forgets the interest that we have to not lose the sympathy that we have preserved in the official German world.” Arendt acknowledged that “the Government has no leverage in the press”, and could do no more than what he had done a few weeks earlier, that is cautioning the direction of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* against “such deplorable irregularities.”⁷³⁶ To no avail, however, for this was not the last time that the Foreign Ministry encountered German criticisms because of allegedly anti-German articles published in *Le Journal de Bruxelles*.⁷³⁷

The reactions of Arendt reveal the powerlessness of the Foreign Ministry. On the one hand, his incapacity to effectively react against opinions published in Belgian newspapers indeed sprung from the wide liberty of the press which was firmly embedded in the Belgian Constitution. This was the result of the Belgian revolutionaries’ conviction that public opinion needed to be the most important foundation of political power in the young state and that journalists needed to have to freedom to function as political watchdogs who critically

⁷³⁴ AMBZ, Classement B, 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Rappports avec la Presse, 1896-1913, Note of Direction P, 26 October 1908.

⁷³⁵ ANONYMOUS, “Les déclarations de Guillaume II et l’impression en Allemagne”, *Journal de Bruxelles*, 5 November 1908.

⁷³⁶ AMBZ, Classement B, 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Rappports avec la Presse, 1896-1913, Note of Direction P, 5 November 1908.

⁷³⁷ See for instance AMBZ, Cl. B, 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Rappports avec la Presse, 1896-1913, Note of Direction P, 8 August 1913.

evaluated the government's policy and constantly pointed to the public's needs and expectations. Of course, afterwards legislators had managed to adapt these ideals to the political reality. With regards to press coverage on foreign policy issues, this had even led to laws forbidding insults of heads of state and government leaders. Theoretically, Arendt thus had the possibility to appeal to court in order to have the journalist who insulted the German emperor put to trial. Yet he knew that this would not lead to conviction and probably only encourage more unpleasant media coverage. Between 1885 and 1914, only twice did a journalist have to appear before the judge for violating these laws. Although the violations were flagrant, comprising accusations of genocidal and pedosexual activities against the Persian Shah in 1895 and utterly insulting comments on Queen Victoria's outward appearance, in both cases the jury decided to acquit the accused.⁷³⁸ Given these precedents, Belgian journalists knew that there were virtually no boundaries as to what and how they could write about issues of international politics.

Difficulties with the Belgian press will probably have made Arendt consider the possibility of following the French and German examples of creating a press bureau inside the Department. In any case, he had his subordinates copy pieces from the political correspondence of Belgian diplomats in other neutral countries which had decided to establish a section responsible for press management in their Foreign Ministries. These diplomats seemed to favour the idea. Fernand Peltzer, advisor at the Belgian legation in Stockholm, pointed out that it not only relieved the head of the Department from a lot of work but also allowed the Ministry to quickly clarify or rectify opinions published in foreign and domestic newspapers. Paul de Groote, minister plenipotentiary in Copenhagen, added that the initiative had come from two Foreign Ministers who were also career diplomats.⁷³⁹

Diplomats vs. Journalists

Although the Belgian Foreign Ministry would wait until after the First World War to establish a section that dealt with the press, Arendt might not have been insensitive to the argument that career diplomats supported such an institution. He knew that many of these men disliked having to deal with journalists themselves and did not feel that influencing the press was included in their own job description. In 1901, the director of an international press agency

⁷³⁸ See DELBECKE, Bram, *De lange schaduw van de grondwetgever. Perswetgeving en persmisdrijven in België, 1831-1914*, unpublished PhD-thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Faculty of Law, 2010, 454-457 and 649-653.

⁷³⁹ AMBZ, Classement B, 72/1, "Mobilisation", *Rapports avec la Presse, 1896-1913*, Fernand Peltzer to Julien Davignon, 28 January 1909, and Paul de Groote to Julien Davignon, 2 December 1909.

established in Brussels requested Count Gontran de Lichtervelde to provide him with lists of periodicals published in his host country, any press items he wished to send him about commercial and industrial ties between Belgium and his host country, and “journals and articles that you would like to send us and that deal with your person, Belgium, your host country or our compatriots.” Lichtervelde politely sent the director part of the requested information, but at the same time informed the Foreign Minister that the propositions made to him in the letter from the director were “little conformable to our duties and our dignity.”⁷⁴⁰

Surely, the way that diplomats interacted with journalists was at least partly conditioned by the reigning norms and values regulating such interactions in their host countries. As advisor at the Belgian legation in London, where informal relations between diplomats and members of the press were quite common, Count Werner van den Steen de Jehay often mingled with newspaper reporters in clubs and at social events. In late 1895, he had arranged for a befriended journalist to ask the Belgian Foreign Minister a few questions about the relations between Belgium and the Congo Free State. Although the published article did not contain any compromising passages, Van den Steen admitted, he felt that his confidence in the journalist had been seriously shaken. The latter had not accepted the changes Van den Steen had made to the eventual text nor allowed him to ask the Prime Minister for permission to have the article published. Disillusioned because “this proves once again how much one has to mistrust journalists, even if they are your friends”, Van den Steen wrote to Van der Elst that “I will give him a dressing down.”⁷⁴¹ Judging from this episode, the aristocratic diplomat Van den Steen had accepted British diplomatic ways of dealing with the press and had even discerned some advantages in these ways. Yet negative encounters such as these again convinced him that journalists were socially inferiors that should be kept out of the realm of diplomacy.

Count Conrad de Buisseret-Steenbecque de Blarenghien felt the same way, and his attitude towards reporters was not mollified by a diplomatic culture favourable towards journalists. From the Algeciras conference in 1906, Buisseret wrote to Van der Elst that “we avoid journalists like the pest... You would have to be here to understand the odiousness of this constant promiscuity with journalists, who try to hunt us down until into our rooms.” At

⁷⁴⁰ AMBZ, Classement B, 72/1, “Mobilisation”, *Rapports avec la Presse, 1896-1913*, Edgard Lebizay to Gontran de Lichtervelde, s.d. [early March 1901]; Gontran de Lichtervelde to Edgard Lebizay, 12 March 1901; Gontran de Lichtervelde to Paul de Favereau, 12 March 1901.

⁷⁴¹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 126, Werner van den Steen de Jehay to Léon Van der Elst, 11 November 1895; Edward Brayley Hodgetts to Werner van den Steen de Jehay, 11 November 1895; HODGETTS, Edward Brayley, “Belgium and the Congo. An interview with M. de Burlet, the Belgian Prime Minister”, *Pall Mall*, 11 November 1895.

one occasion, however, Buisseret had not been able “to shirk from a conversation with the only correspondent of a Belgian newspaper present in Algeciras, the one of *Le Soir*.”⁷⁴² The turn of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of what Pierre Van den Dungen has labelled the “Belgian great reporter”. This type of journalist, who was often commissioned by several newspapers at a time with a view to reducing travelling costs, roamed the European continent and beyond in order to cover world events. These included the diplomatic conferences which in the decades before the First World War became more common. The presence of Belgian journalists at international conferences emblemized the increasing attention in Belgian newspapers for world affairs.⁷⁴³ As the country’s representatives on the international scene, diplomats indirectly received more attention and, as we will see, figured more prominently in the Belgian press as the First World War was approaching.

Remarkably enough, however, diplomats seem to have complained only very rarely about their press representation to the Foreign Minister, who was the one person entitled to respond to allegations against them. Moreover, the few times that diplomats did complain, it concerned information published in either *L’Indépendance belge* or *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, Belgium’s leading quality newspapers. In early 1906, Baron Henry de Woelmont worried about a piece in *L’Indépendance belge* that announced that he was to reside only temporarily in London, which he claimed to be the posting of his dreams, while in early 1909, Baron Ludovic Moncheur agonized over an article in the same journal that did not mention his transfer from Washington to Constantinople.⁷⁴⁴ Two years later, Baron Paul Guillaume, the Belgian minister plenipotentiary in Paris, protested against a “snippet” in *L’Indépendance belge* that claimed that he was taking the baths in Spa. “This information is absolutely false,” Guillaume wrote to the Foreign Minister, emphasizing that “since my return, immediately after the death of my regretted mother, I have not left Paris for a day, not even on Sundays.”⁷⁴⁵ Paul Guillaume, so it seems, certainly reckoned with the power of the press in times of democratization. He probably knew that *L’Indépendance belge* was not the most widely distributed Belgian newspaper. Yet he also knew that the generally credible contents of this quality journal had not only earned it a good reputation among both foreign and domestic elites but also made it into a valuable source for other newspapers to find information about Belgian diplomats. In such a medium, Guillaume surely did not wish to be

⁷⁴² ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 42, Conrad de Buisseret to Léon Van der Elst, s.d. [early 1906].

⁷⁴³ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieux de presse*, 378-379.

⁷⁴⁴ AMBZ, PF 1407, “Henry de Woelmont”, Henry de Woelmont to Léon Arendt, 10 April 1906; PF 1225, “Ludovic Moncheur”, Ludovic Moncheur to Léon Arendt, 30 March 1909.

⁷⁴⁵ AMBZ, PF 143, “Paul Guillaume”, Paul Guillaume to Julien Davignon, 19 September 1911.

depicted as answering to the description of the idle aristocratic diplomat who spent the taxpayer's money bathing himself in luxury instead of working to defend the country's interests abroad.

There were more aspects to the representation of Belgian diplomats that offended Baron Guillaume. In early 1909 a journalist of *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, the newspaper that was considered to be voicing the government's stance, joyfully remembered that some decades before, students of the Catholic University of Leuven had colourfully painted the statue of Sylvain van de Weyer, one of Belgium's founding fathers and most outstanding diplomats.⁷⁴⁶ Guillaume reacted furiously and urged Foreign Minister Davignon to take action. Guillaume complained that "the journalist finds the deed of these brats to be witty and amusing; he calls 'a certain Sylvain van de Weyer' the man who, with remarkable talent and charming intellect, has honoured the Belgian diplomatic career." It particularly offended Guillaume that "this sad scribbler approves of the students of Louvain having protested against ... 'the undeserved fame' of the eminent man who ranks highly among the founders of the Belgian Monarchy." According to Guillaume, "Mr Van de Weyer had a way of understanding patriotism that is very different from the small minded electoral expediency that nowadays fills the columns of the Belgian press and pushes aside every concern for the national independence and the superior interests of the Belgian fatherland."⁷⁴⁷

Through the example of Van de Weyer, Baron Guillaume on the one hand implicitly denounced the lack of respect that Belgian journalists showed for their country's diplomats. He indeed felt that journalists considered them as negligible quantity and did not value their status as the defenders of Belgian foreign interests. On the other hand, Guillaume connects this attitude to the journalists' conception of patriotism and its relation to the rise of the party-political system, which had established itself in the wake of the 1848 franchise extensions and had gained momentum after the widening of the suffrage in the 1890s. Guillaume seems to have identified himself with Van de Weyer. Both were diplomats and men who, in Guillaume's opinion, had an elevated conception of what true patriotism really meant. As Rogers Brubaker has argued, patriotism is a flexible political language that allows to frame political arguments by appealing to metaphysical entities such as the fatherland, the country, and the nation.⁷⁴⁸ Guillaume explained patriotism by recurring to a discourse that centred

⁷⁴⁶ ANONYMOUS, "Une joyeuse escapade. Comment en l'an de grâce 1879, des escoliers enluminèrent la statue de Sylvain Van de Weyer", *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 9 May 1910.

⁷⁴⁷ AMBZ, PF 143, "Paul Guillaume", Paul Guillaume to Julien Davignon, 11 May 1909.

⁷⁴⁸ BRUBAKER, Rogers, "In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism", *Citizenship Studies*, 8/2, 2004, 120.

around unionism and transcending party-based struggles in the service of the *patria* that all Belgians shared. He equated the Belgian press with the party-political system. The ascents of both parts of this equation was highly stimulated by processes of democratization, and inevitably – again in Guillaume’s opinion – led to lesser conceptions of patriotism. Guillaume reproached Belgian journalists with stirring up differences of opinion between members of the Belgian nation. The journalist had indeed depicted Van de Weyer as a Liberal and attributed the decision to commission a statue of the diplomat to the Liberal administration of Louvain.⁷⁴⁹ Guillaume seems to have felt that Van de Weyer could not be labelled as an affiliate of any political party whatsoever: Van de Weyer was a patriot, and as such these narrow-minded markers did not apply to him.⁷⁵⁰

Yet there was more to it. Guillaume must have known that the statue of Van de Weyer had been contested since before its unveiling. The authorities had erected the statue to remind later generations of the patriotism and civic virtues of the great Belgian Sylvain Van de Weyer. However, many citizens of Louvain did not accept this message. For them, Van de Weyer was someone who had only shortly lived in Louvain and had left the city for good already before Belgian independence. He had also left the country to reside in London from 1831 onwards, returning only sporadically to Brussels to take up political mandates. Van de Weyer had even assumed the British nationality and thus died a Briton in the early 1870s.⁷⁵¹ Most likely, both the Catholic students’ decision to paint the statue of Van de Weyer and the approval of this deed by the journalist of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* were driven by the sentiment that someone like Van de Weyer did not really belong to the Belgian nation. In Guillaume’s opinion, also such representations fitted in the conception of patriotism that he loathed. They moreover made the public to lose its respect for diplomats. For Guillaume, journalists were at least partly to blame for this.

In the years that followed his indictment against Belgian journalism Guillaume could have read several more times that diplomats stayed too long in foreign lands and had lost touch with their fatherland. Similar comments were indeed published in progressive journals *Le Soir* and *La Chronique* but also in more conservative press organs such as the Catholic journal *La Métropole*. It was probably no coincidence that all these newspapers counted

⁷⁴⁹ ANONYMOUS, “Une joyeuse escapade”.

⁷⁵⁰ However, as Vincent Viaene argues, Van de Weyer’s affiliation with the Liberal Party was indisputable. See VIAENE, “Leopold I”, 130.

⁷⁵¹ On Van de Weyer, see VANDER LINDEN, Albert, “Weyer (Jean-Sylvain) Van de”, *BN*, 27, 1958, 245-274. Sentiments of aversion towards Van de Weyer still seem to be present in Louvain, as an article in a news letter of the Historical Society of Louvain illustrates. See “Sylvain van de Weyer. Een standbeeld op de dool”, *Nieuwsbrief Leuven Historisch Genootschap*, February 2009, 3.

(future) nationalists amongst the men and women filling their columns.⁷⁵² Deeply regretting the events of 1839 and greatly favouring overseas expansion, a stronger army and a more active foreign policy, Guillaume had a lot in common with these journalists. He could not, however, accept the way they depicted his predecessors.

Yet Guillaume could also read eulogies on men from the first generation of Belgian diplomats, and most notably on Van de Weyer, in both *Le Soir* and in *La Gazette*.⁷⁵³ One journalist of this progressive Liberal newspaper used the cases of Belgium's first diplomats to condemn the limited access to the diplomatic career that the Belgian government had established in the late nineteenth century. "In our country diplomacy has become the apanage of a few families", the journalist of *La Gazette* regretted, opposing the scions of these aristocratic families to "our first diplomats, those who had to solve the greatest difficulties, like Van de Weyer, Lehon, Rogier." The journalist added that also the most outstanding diplomats of a later generation did not belong to the high aristocracy, which led him to plead for the reorganization of access to the diplomatic career, stating that "it is time to broaden and rejuvenate our diplomatic corps."⁷⁵⁴ Glorifications of the first generation of Belgian diplomats seem to have been part of a tendency of some Belgian journalists to eulogize foreign and domestic diplomats of the olden times.⁷⁵⁵ This, of course, was but one expression of the lack of trust they had in the diplomats of their own time.

At any rate, the displeasure of Guillaume with the way that his idol Van de Weyer was portrayed reveals the growing susceptibility of both diplomats and Foreign Ministry officials to criticisms coming from newspapers. On the one hand, as we have seen, they directed their attention towards defining the Foreign Ministry's dealings with the press in cases when Belgian journalists denounced the foreign policies of other countries. On the other hand, we also know that, from 1910 onwards, officials at the Foreign Ministry took a growing interest in press criticisms of the organisation of the diplomatic career. First, they seem to have wanted to form a more global picture by looking at how the diplomatic career was evaluated in other countries. The basis of their enquiry was a collection of nineteen press cuttings about

⁷⁵² See ANONYMOUS, "Petite Gazette. La formation économique de notre corps diplomatique", *Le Soir*, 14 May 1914; ANONYMOUS, "Nos représentants à l'étranger", *La Chronique*, 18 November 1910; and ANONYMOUS, "Nos diplomates", *La Métropole*, 6 July 1910. *La Métropole* had copied from the bimonthly *L'Écho de l'industrie*, see ANONYMOUS, "Au cabinet du Roi", *L'Écho de l'industrie*, 3 July 1910.

⁷⁵³ ANONYMOUS, "Une conférence de M. Paul Hymans. 1830. – Les Fondateurs. Quelques figures du temps", *Le Soir*, 28 March 1914; ANONYMOUS, "Notre corps diplomatique. Son organisation", *La Gazette*, 3 October 1912.

⁷⁵⁴ ANONYMOUS, "Notre corps diplomatique. Son organisation", *La Gazette*, 3 October 1912.

⁷⁵⁵ See for instance SILAS [Louis Dumont-Wilden], "La diplomatie des rois", *Le Soir*, 20 February 1909 (republished on 14 June 1910 with the title "Le Métier du Roi"); and GRINGOIRE, "Un fin diplomate", *Le Soir*, 7 July 1909.

this topic from German newspapers and exactly the same amount from French dailies, which reveals to what extent the Political Direction took care to steer a middle course between the German Scylla and the French Charybdis. The constructed dossier also contained two articles from British and one from Italian newspapers. In most of these articles, Foreign Ministry officials could read that also in other European countries, journalists urged their governments to democratize the access to the diplomatic career by recruiting less candidates from the aristocracy and by focusing on the aspiring diplomats' knowledge of commerce and industry instead. Some foreign journalists suggested the same solutions as their Belgian colleagues, namely merging the diplomatic and consular careers and increasing diplomatic salaries. Interestingly enough, the collection of cuttings contains both articles from unofficial government press organs and from the large, established opposition newspapers.⁷⁵⁶ Belgian Foreign Ministry officials arguably wished to deduct from foreign newspapers not only arguments for reorganizing the diplomatic career but also those used to counter such urgings.

The collection also contains forty-five articles from the Belgian press. As such, it gives at least some indications about which newspapers Foreign Ministry officials deemed worthy to take into account. Presumably because Flemish language newspapers had little influence on the political establishment, the collection includes no cuttings of *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, *Gazet van Antwerpen* or of other Flemish dailies.⁷⁵⁷ Tellingly, only one article was cut from *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, the newspaper closest to the Foreign Ministry. Seven others came from other Catholic journals, such as *Le XXe siècle*, *Le Patriote*, and the Antwerp-based conservative newspaper *La Métropole*.⁷⁵⁸ In addition to three cuttings from the Socialist daily *Le Peuple* and an equal number from *Le Soir*, the collection comprised thirty-one articles from Liberal newspapers, among which ten from *La Gazette*, seven from *L'Indépendance belge*, four from *Le Petit Bleu*, three from *La Chronique*, and two each from *Le Matin* and *La Meuse*.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁶ AMBZ, 103, "Systèmes diplomatiques et consulaires. Diplomatie et consulats". The file contains clippings from the German newspapers *National-Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, *Kölnische Zeitung*, and *Neue Freie Presse*; from the French newspapers *Le Temps*, *Le Siècle*, *Le Matin* and *Le Journal des Débats*; from the British newspaper *The Times*; and from the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.

⁷⁵⁷ This is not to say that their contents were completely ignored. One employee of the Foreign Ministry's library seems to have searched Flemish language newspapers and reviews every day, and translated relevant articles from these publications in French, so that other functionaries could read them. See LECLERCQ, Alphonse, "Les Archives et la Bibliothèque de notre ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Le service des traductions", *La Meuse*, 6 November 1913.

⁷⁵⁸ The collection also contains one article from *La Gazette de Liège*.

⁷⁵⁹ The collection also contains two articles from *Le Matin*, *Le Journal de Liège*, and *La Meuse*, and one from *La Dernière Heure*.

In order to make more sense of these numbers, it is necessary to look into the contents of the articles contained in the press cuttings collection. Two thirds of these dealt with a wide variety of topics, ranging from reports about criticisms on the diplomatic career in other countries, over comments on incidents with foreign diplomats in Brussels, on the purchase of legation buildings by the Belgian state and on the merits of Foreign Minister Davignon, to articles about Belgian consuls and necessary reforms of the consular career. Only the remaining third of the press cuttings dealt with the qualities of Belgian diplomats or with the organisation of the diplomatic career. This third comprised six comments from *La Gazette*, three from *La Chronique*, two each from *L'Indépendance belge* and *Le Soir*, and one from *La Meuse* and *Le Matin*.

These were all newspapers associated with the Liberal opposition. At least partly, their presence in the collection could probably be explained by a combination of their political weight, the intensity of their criticisms and the frequency with which they wrote about diplomats. The latter criterion can only be determined with some precision for *L'Indépendance belge*, *Le Soir*, and *La Meuse*, the only ones of these papers that have been digitized. It seems that *L'Indépendance belge* and *La Meuse* ranked among the Belgian newspapers that devoted the most attention to diplomats. In the case of *Le Soir*, its strongly risen political influence turned it into a journal that the political establishment needed to reckon with. While in 1897 its readers, in the opinion of the German minister plenipotentiary in Brussels, came from the lower classes and bought about 90.000 copies of the daily, another German minister had to acknowledge five years later that “the level of the journal has greatly increased, both its contents and the quality of its readers.”⁷⁶⁰ By then, *Le Soir*'s daily circulation had further expanded to 125.000 copies. In April 1914, the still growing number of sold copies made Edmond Patris, *Le Soir*'s main political journalist, feel confident enough to declare to the German minister that “when one gives me an item that does not sound very probable to me, I call the competent Minister on the phone and I am immediately informed; same thing for the King's Secretariat.”⁷⁶¹ In the years before the outbreak of the First World War, both *La Chronique*, *Le Matin*, *La Meuse* and *La Gazette* did not averagely sell more than one tenth of *Le Soir*'s copy sales, while *L'Indépendance belge* saw its readership further diminish to a few thousands. All these journals did have one important strength, namely the

⁷⁶⁰ WILLEQUET, *Documents*, 37 and 44.

⁷⁶¹ WILLEQUET, *Documents*, 78.

political influence of their readers. This applied especially to *La Gazette*, the “quality” of whose readers led the German minister to label it as “a very highly esteemed journal.”⁷⁶²

The next section will reveal that the depiction of Belgian diplomats and of diplomacy in the years before the First World War, showed several continuities but also underwent some modifications. Thematically investigating what changed and what stayed the same, this section will give special attention to the newspaper articles about Belgian diplomats which the Belgian Foreign Ministry officials collected.

§ 5. Press Representations on the Eve of the First World War

The Depiction of Belgian Diplomats

Comparing the early 1890s with roughly the decade before 1914, the previous chapter has investigated four noteworthy developments in parliamentary debates about Belgian diplomats, namely the appearance of criticisms about the diplomats’ alleged ignorance of the Flemish language; the shifts in the opposition’s discourses away from attacking the diplomats’ elevated salaries; the louder demands for a merger between the diplomatic and consular careers; and for a fusion between these careers and the administrative career. With a view to sketching the portrait that Belgian journalists made of their country’s diplomats, this section adopts the same approach but also adds a few elements in order to provide a fuller picture.

Where the diplomats’ knowledge of the Flemish language is concerned, it seems that the pleas of the Flemish militant Pieter Daens resounded as softly in parliament as they did in the press. Only *Het Laatste Nieuws*, the sole Flemish language newspaper that from time to time wrote about the country’s diplomatic representatives, had something to say about the matter. Evaluating the foreign budget in February 1911, one of its journalists complained that the rapporteur of the budget “has not squeaked a word about the ignorance [of Flemish] of our diplomats, ... especially in countries where Belgian Flemings reside.”⁷⁶³ The apparent absence of similar comments in the Catholic dailies *Het Nieuws van den Dag* and *De Gazet van Antwerpen* could perhaps be explained by their support of the government, but also by another article published in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, which paraphrased the speech of a clerk at a pro-Flemish meeting. This clerk declared: “What do we care that diplomats mostly speak

⁷⁶² WILLEQUET, *Documents*, 73.

⁷⁶³ ANONYMOUS, “De Begrooting. Begrooting van Buitenlandsche Zaken”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 19 February 1911.

French. We are no diplomats. We have not even seen that sort of people from afar.”⁷⁶⁴ Foremost aiming to provide their readers, which sprung from the lower classes of Belgian society, with the information that they were believed to be interested in, the editors of *Het Nieuws van den Dag* en *Gazet van Antwerpen* might indeed have felt that Belgian diplomats did not fit into that category.⁷⁶⁵

Newspapers like *Gazet van Antwerpen* and *Het Nieuws van den Dag* did not mention the costliness of the Belgian diplomatic corps either. Here they seemed to follow a more general tendency. Even in the more progressive newspapers such as *La Gazette*, *Le Peuple*, and *Het Laatste Nieuws* direct attacks on the elevated salaries of diplomats had made way for tacit and parenthetical criticisms in articles that dealt with other aspects of Belgian diplomacy.⁷⁶⁶

Conversely, several Belgian journalists seemed to accept increases in the budget for Foreign Affairs. Some of them even urged the government to raise the diplomats' salaries. One such plea came from *Le XXe Siècle*, which after the entry of its directors Helleputte and Broqueville in the Cabinet gradually took over *Le Journal de Bruxelles*'s reputation of being the government's unofficial voice.⁷⁶⁷ However, more than its predecessor, *Le XXe siècle* sometimes took a critical stance towards governmental decisions concerning Belgian diplomats.⁷⁶⁸ So too in the case of the diplomats' salaries. The journalist of *Le XXe siècle* called these “laughable” and “the craziest money-saver there is.” The choice, he then implicitly argued, was between rich and incapable diplomats on the one hand, and men of value, energy and dedication who lacked prestige because they did not have the means to support life in diplomacy. Only the latter persons were acceptable as diplomats, the journalist stated by asking his readers (and indirectly the government): “How do you want naïve or

⁷⁶⁴ ANONYMOUS, “Het 3^e Kongres der Vlaamsche Bedienden van Openbare Besturen”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 30 September 1912.

⁷⁶⁵ See VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 125-128; DE BENS, *De Pers in België*, 248 and 287-288. Flemish workers abroad sooner came into contact with Belgian consuls. Their ignorance of the Flemish tongue did encounter criticisms from *Het Nieuws van den Dag*. See ANONYMOUS, “Hier en daar. Een goed voorbeeld”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 21 March 1909.

⁷⁶⁶ ANONYMOUS, “Petite Chronique”, *Le Peuple*, 18 January 1912; ANONYMOUS, “Diplomates et consuls”, *La Gazette*, 19 March 1912; ANONYMOUS, “Japaneesche toren! De begroting van het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 27 October 1909; ANONYMOUS, “Kronijk van den dag”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 23 July 1913.

⁷⁶⁷ BITSCH, *La Belgique*, 279-280.

⁷⁶⁸ See for instance ANONYMOUS, “Chronique du jour. M. Marquet chez le roi”, *Le XXe siècle*, 15 October 1912. In this article, the journalist commented on the Spanish King's reception of the director of *Le Petit Bleu*, which was set up by Belgian diplomats. He felt that “diplomats who have the honour to represent our country have other things to than to negotiate such receptions.”

barbarous merchant people to ever believe in the richness and prosperity of a country whose diplomatic representatives live in mediocrity?”⁷⁶⁹

One journalist of *L'Indépendance belge* agreed, but added that the insufficient salaries could also have negative repercussions on Belgium's high political relations with other countries. He knew that in late 1911 the Foreign Ministry had difficulties finding a successor to Count Edouard de Grelle-Rogier, the Belgian minister plenipotentiary in Saint-Petersburg who had died some time before. Only Baron Albéric Fallon, the journalist argued, was rich enough to bear the costs that representing the country in the Russian capital entailed. Yet Fallon had only just been named head of the Belgian legation in the Netherlands. Moving him to Saint-Petersburg would make the Dutch government believe that Belgium considered the posting in The Hague as merely transitory, and thus of minor importance. This, the journalist suggested, could put Belgian-Dutch friendship under pressure.⁷⁷⁰ To justify their demands for increasing the salaries of Belgian diplomats, journalists of *La Chronique* and *La Dernière Heure*, a Liberal daily which quickly after its foundation in 1906 gained a wide readership, invoked what could be labelled as 'democratic' arguments. The government had to stop sending only millionaires abroad, a journalist of *La Chronique* stated, suggesting that access to the diplomatic career had to be widened.⁷⁷¹ A colleague of *La Dernière Heure* sided with this idea of wider recruitment and backed it up by stating that these measures were “demanded by public opinion.”⁷⁷²

It is unclear what the journalist of *La Dernière Heure* meant by 'public opinion'. Before 1914, Dominik Geppert argues, the concept constituted “the opposite of 'official opinion'”, and comprised “all those non-governmental beliefs, assessments, and ideas that were given public expression.”⁷⁷³ One of these public expressions was voiced from the opposition banks in parliament, where Liberal parliamentarians indeed urged the government to increase diplomatic salaries for many of the same reasons that were invoked by the journalists from *L'Indépendance belge*, *La Dernière Heure* and *La Chronique*, all of which generally supported the Liberal Party.

The third and fourth developments in parliamentary discussions about Belgian diplomats in the decades before the First World War filled the columns of the Belgian press as

⁷⁶⁹ ANONYMOUS, “Chronique du Jour – Voeux diplomatiques”, *Le XXe siècle*, 26 August 1909.

⁷⁷⁰ ANONYMOUS, “Au Jour le Jour. Dans le corps diplomatique”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 11 November 1911. See also X.X.X., “Pour nos consuls. Le budget des Affaires étrangères en Belgique”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 11 and 13 March 1914.

⁷⁷¹ ANONYMOUS, “Nos représentants à l'étranger”, *La Chronique*, 18 November 1910.

⁷⁷² ANONYMOUS, “Le personnel des légations de Belgique”, *La Dernière Heure*, 31 July 1911. For *La Dernière Heure*, see DE BENS, *De pers in België*, 383.

⁷⁷³ GEPPERT, “The Public Challenge to Diplomacy”, 133-134.

well. This especially applied to the issue of merging the diplomatic and consular careers. Admittedly, the Flemish language newspapers did not seem to have bothered about the matter. Just like their counterparts in parliament, Socialist journalists did not either. The topic was, however, debated in French language newspapers of Liberal denomination. In early 1910, complaints about the diplomats' lack of initiative in defending the country's commercial interests had already aroused criticisms from the small, progressive daily *Le Petit Bleu*.⁷⁷⁴ However, officials at the Foreign Ministry considered *Le Petit Bleu* "a newspaper with a very shady reputation" that "no longer enjoys any esteem."⁷⁷⁵

That could not be said of the highly respected *L'Indépendance belge*, which surprisingly enough seems to have been the first journal to really address the problem of merging the careers of the foreign service. In March 1911, one of its journalists started an article stating that "our official representation abroad is not at all what it ought to be." Having undoubtedly attracted the attention of his readers, the journalist hurried to explain that "this is not always the fault of our diplomats, but rather of how are diplomatic services are organised." He claimed that there was only one solution, namely "the fusion of the diplomatic and consular careers." Using the same arguments as Liberal delegates in parliament, he then explained that this measure had led to "excellent results" in other countries and imposed itself all the more in a neutral country that lived of its industry and commerce. The journalist believed that letting consuls enter the diplomatic career would only stimulate their zeal and would also constitute a compensation for their long stays in faraway lands with unhealthy climates. But this penetration of the most senior consuls into the diplomatic career would not suffice to solve the Department's problem of finding enough adequate candidates to fill diplomatic postings, the journalist knew. He therefore repeated that "the truly rational solution consists in fusing the two careers."⁷⁷⁶ In later articles, journalists of *L'Indépendance belge* kept pleading for the merger of both careers, one time by urging the Foreign Minister to consider consuls for the office of his *chef de cabinet*, another time by asking the government to grant all vice-consuls and economically schooled candidates the possibility to take the diplomatic exam.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁴ GASPART, Alfred W., "À propos d'une exposition. La mission de nos consuls. Ce qu'elle 'devrait' être", *Le Petit Bleu*, 11 March 1910.

⁷⁷⁵ AMBZ, PF 1169, "Charles Renoz", Léon Arendt to Charles Renoz, s.d. [early May 1910].

⁷⁷⁶ ANONYMOUS, "Belgique. Notre représentation à l'étranger", *L'Indépendance belge*, 18 March 1911.

⁷⁷⁷ See ANONYMOUS, "Au Jour le Jour. Aux affaires étrangères", *L'Indépendance belge*, 9 January 1912; ANONYMOUS, "Au Jour le Jour. L'expansion belge et les agents du service extérieur", *L'Indépendance belge*, 23 April 1914.

One journalist of *La Meuse* also wished to upgrade the status of Belgian consuls, but did not wish to go as far as his colleague from *L'Indépendance belge* did. On the one hand, he understood that all agents of the Belgian foreign service worked together on “the same oeuvre of expansion” and therefore should be recruited and trained in the same way. Yet on the other hand, he opposed, it would be practically impossible to find enough candidates that possessed the necessary qualities to succeed in both careers. As such, the journalist of *La Meuse* suggested that “a certain penetration of one career in the other” would suffice. Perhaps because of the need for diplomats to stay in touch with their home country, he did approve of the idea to merge the diplomatic and administrative careers.⁷⁷⁸

His colleagues of *La Gazette*, who were long-time critics of the Belgian diplomatic corps, reacted that they could not be satisfied with a mere “mutual penetration” between the diplomatic and consular corps. In an article published only a few weeks before the outbreak of the First World War, they supported the idea of a fusion by fiercely criticizing, as they had done many times before, the undemocratic access to the diplomatic career. “For years one has loudly clamoured for a serious reorganisation of the bases of the recruitment of our diplomats but still the ‘Career’ stays closed to the members of the consular corps whose aptitudes and competences have been acknowledged”, one of their journalists stated. He knew why, namely because “the traditionalists” assumed a “superbly disdainful” attitude towards consuls, whom they believed could never adequately represent the country abroad. To these people, the journalist of *La Gazette* explained, “it matters little that our diplomacy could be an elite of knowledgeable and talented men who are capable of appreciating and favouring our national interests abroad.” For the traditionalists, he concluded, “it suffices that she [the Belgian diplomatic corps] stays a tightly restricted caste into which one can only penetrate with the help of many quarters of nobility and rent.”⁷⁷⁹ The Foreign Ministry’s resistance to changing diplomatic career patterns had often led journalists of *La Gazette* to write satirical pieces on what they regarded as a reactionary department populated by an anachronistic elite.⁷⁸⁰

More than *L'Indépendance belge* and *La Meuse*, which generally adopted a more moderate tone and also published articles that put Belgian diplomats in a favourable light, *La Gazette* voiced opinions very similar to those of the most critical progressive Liberal

⁷⁷⁸ ANONYMOUS, “Informations financières. Diplomates et Consuls”, *La Meuse*, 18 February 1913. See also ANONYMOUS, “Belgique. Aux Affaires Etrangères”, *La Meuse*, 13 February 1912; and ANONYMOUS, “Revue de la presse belge: Diplomates et consuls”, *La Meuse*, 20 March 1912.

⁷⁷⁹ ANONYMOUS, “La réorganisation de notre corps diplomatique”, *La Gazette*, 11 July 1914. See also ANONYMOUS, “Diplomates et consuls”, *La Gazette*, 19 March 1912; and ANONYMOUS, “Notre corps diplomatique. Son organisation”, *La Gazette*, 3 October 1912.

⁷⁸⁰ See, in addition to the aforementioned articles, especially ANONYMOUS, “Une belle Réforme”, *La Gazette*, 29 October 1912.

parliamentarians who urged for the fusion of the diplomatic and consular careers. There indeed seems to have existed a powerful Liberal consensus in press and parliament in favour of a fusion of the careers of the foreign service, or at least in favour of a mutual penetration between them. The materialization of this consensus could all the more be expected when, in 1918, the first Liberal politician in more than thirty-three years took over the Foreign Ministry.

More generally, the many possible comparisons between the discourses of Belgian politicians and journalists before the First World War point to the existence of a common critical mind-set about the country's diplomats and about the organisation of the diplomatic career. As the chapter on Belgian parliamentarians has shown, a competing, apologetic mind-set that contained positive images of diplomats existed as well. In the case of Belgian journalists, these were published primarily in *L'Indépendance belge*. Like they did more than two decades earlier, journalists of this Liberal journal still regularly praised the merits of Belgian diplomats and sometimes condemned negative representations of these functionaries in other newspapers.⁷⁸¹ Journalists of *L'Indépendance belge* also tried to counter arguments about the Belgian diplomatic corps as an anachronistic, incapable and idle elite of profiteers. Explaining how the access to the diplomatic career was regulated, one of them claimed that aspiring diplomats "would be quite naïve if they believed that the [diplomatic and commercial] exams were established to give access to a career." On the contrary, the journalist argued, "the exams are made to prevent the candidates from entering." Many of his colleagues writing for more progressive newspapers would actually have agreed. However, they would have asserted that the exams were just an excuse to flunk candidates who lacked sufficient financial means and noble titles. The journalist of *L'Indépendance belge*, by contrast, attributed the restricted access to "the terribly difficult tests" about "varied and extended subject matters." As a consequence, he argued, those who passed the exams were "top notch, endowed with an erudite baggage of the first order" and had "completed the intellectual gymnastics that enabled them to compete with (even to outrank) the representatives of the most advanced nations."⁷⁸² The same journalist described Conrad de Buisseret as "one of the most active and intelligent among our diplomats" and as "imbued

⁷⁸¹ See for instance ANONYMOUS, "Chronique mondaine", *L'Indépendance belge*, 7 November 1911; ANONYMOUS, "Au Jour le Jour. Dans le corps diplomatique", *L'Indépendance belge*, 11 November 1911; and ANONYMOUS, "Les journaux belges. Une note sardonique de *La Gazette*", *L'Indépendance belge*, 14 February 1911.

⁷⁸² R.Z., "Chronique mondaine", *L'Indépendance belge*, 29 August 1911.

with the modern methods.”⁷⁸³ In an article about the death of Count de Grelle-Rogier, he accompanied his praising words about the career of this diplomat with a reminder to his readers that “our diplomats ... do not content themselves with eating their patrimonies in the Career; many of them have lost their lives [serving the country].”⁷⁸⁴ One journalist of the Antwerp-based Liberal newspaper *Le Matin* also set herself up as an advocate of Belgian diplomats. She regretted that “diplomats are so often represented [...] as haughty characters” who were only good for “prancing in their gold-embroidered uniforms studded with decorations.” In reality, she opposed, “diplomats are animated by the noble ambition to serve their country, and renounced from the restful prerogatives of fortune and rank to condemn themselves to voluntary exile.”⁷⁸⁵ If these journalists of conservative Liberal media such as *L'Indépendance belge* and *Le Matin* were to be believed, the Belgian diplomatic corps consisted of hardworking, self-abnegating servants of the country who successfully faced the demands of twentieth century diplomacy.

Surely, the emphasis put by these journalists on the diplomats’ qualities and merits suggests that more critical representations of Belgian diplomats still prevailed, and not merely in drama and literature. Yet also newspapers that in the late 1880s and early 1890s tended to put Belgian diplomats in an invariably unflattering light, seemed to have experienced no difficulties to occasionally stress the merits of individual diplomats in the decade before the First World War. A journalist from *Het Laatste Nieuws* praised Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens as “one of our most appreciated and intelligent diplomats” who moreover had “rendered services to the country” during struggles between Belgium and Great-Britain over the Congo.⁷⁸⁶ The political reporter of *Le Soir* regretted the death of Count Gontran de Lichtervelde, whom he described as “one of the most distinguished members of our diplomatic corps, and in whom we put the highest hopes.”⁷⁸⁷

It is unclear why exactly these journalists commended Beyens and Lichtervelde. It could have been misinformation, it could have been rebel voices within the journalistic corps of one newspaper, yet it could also have been true admiration based on shared ideological assumptions or some kind of ideological affinity. In the case of *Het Laatste Nieuws*, Baron Beyens’s fairly sympathetic attitude towards the demands of the Flemish movement, which the Flemish leader Frans Van Cauwelaert would greatly appreciate during the First World

⁷⁸³ R.Z., “Chronique mondaine”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 13 September 1911.

⁷⁸⁴ R.Z., “Chronique mondaine”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 15 September 1911.

⁷⁸⁵ CHRISTIANE [pseudonym of a certain Madame Bernaëys], “Loin du Pays”, *Le Matin*, 31 July 1910.

⁷⁸⁶ ANONYMOUS, “Kronijk van den dag”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 14 February 1910.

⁷⁸⁷ ANONYMOUS, “Petite Gazette. Nos diplomates. — Le comte de Lichtervelde”, *Le Soir*, 30 March 1905.

War, might already have been known to the newspaper's owner Julius Hoste.⁷⁸⁸ In the case of *Le Soir*, it would become very clear during the First World War that Edmond Patris, the newspaper's main political reporter, felt as passionate as Lichtervelde senior about the idea of a Greater Belgium.⁷⁸⁹

Patris would find a kindred spirit in Fernand Neuray, who had become director-manager of *Le XXe siècle* in 1900.⁷⁹⁰ In the years before the First World War, this newspaper never seems to have assumed the role of its predecessor as the government's unofficial press organ, *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, which generally redressed reproaches towards Belgian diplomats published in other newspapers. On the contrary, journalists of *Le XXe siècle* sometimes criticised the country's diplomatic representatives themselves. As we will see in the next chapter, this might have had something to do with the aversion towards many senior diplomats of both Neuray and of one of the journal's owners, the Cabinet Chief Charles de Broqueville. Yet at least one senior diplomat could count on their full support, namely Baron Emile de Cartier de Marchienne, who in the media was closely linked with Leopold II's colonial oeuvre because of "his bravery during the Revolt of the Boxers."⁷⁹¹

The praising comments of these dailies, all of which had originated from the wave of mass media that rolled over Belgium from the 1880s onwards, reveal an established interest of their journalists and most likely, their readers as well, in Belgian diplomacy. As a result, they gradually got to know Belgian diplomats, which allowed them to discern individual characteristics of a small number of diplomats alongside the features of the Belgian diplomatic corps as a whole.

Because this chapter focuses on the representation of diplomats in the newspaper press, it inevitably tends to downplay the depiction of these men in other written media. In addition to practical reasons, such as the lack of digitized weekly and monthly reviews, it – admittedly somewhat uncritically – invokes the authority of 'Bob' as justification. In his 1919 memoirs, Léon 'Bob' Souguenet argued that in pre-war Belgium newspapers predominated all other publications and did "not at all have that competitor or that support that are the reviews, the weeklies in France, and the magazines of all rank in England." In Belgium, Souguenet repeated, "one has only newspapers, and more newspapers."⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁸ DE SCHRIJVER, Reginald (ed.), *Uit het archief van Frans Van Cauwelaert '1'. Gedenkschriften over Vlaamse Beweging en Belgische Politiek, 1895-1918*, Antwerpen, 1971, 280.

⁷⁸⁹ DE SCHRIJVER, *Uit het archief*, 282.

⁷⁹⁰ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieus de presse*, 331.

⁷⁹¹ ANONYMOUS, "Les Nouvelles. Dans le corps diplomatique", *Le XXe Siècle*, 16 May 1910.

⁷⁹² SOUGUENET, Léon, *Témoignages. Souvenirs d'un journaliste français de Belgique*, Brussels and Paris, 1919, 33.

Of course, this does not alter the fact that also weekly and monthly reviews from time to time devoted some attention to Belgian diplomats. In late December 1912, it happened to Prince Pierre de Caraman Chimay. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Caraman ranked, like Lichtervelde, among the fiercest defenders of the Belgian colonial empire. A little more than two months before his speech on *Patriotisme et Patrie*, Caraman was lionized in the Brussels-based monthly *Le Home*, a review which was primarily concerned with interior design. A journalist with the initials J.V.D. recurred to the same organic imagery as Caraman employed before the audience of the *Société Belge d'Études Coloniales*, to glorify Belgian national expansion. "Our growing prosperity confirms the virtues of our race before the eyes of Europe", J.V.D. claimed, adding that it also showed that "with will power and energy a young nation can rapidly rise to a nation of the first rank." In this process, J.V.D. continued, diplomats like Prince Pierre de Caraman Chimay played a decisive part. Because diplomats were not allowed to talk in public, J.V.D. explained, he took it upon himself to make clear to his readers that Caraman's only concern was the good of his country. Without mentioning which services exactly, J.V.D. asserted that Caraman had "rendered spectacular services, [...] always longing [...] to spend without counting to provide more vigour and cohesion to our national ideas." Likewise, J.V.D. stressed, the prince also spent a lot of time and money to charity. Remarkably enough, he had this comment followed by the question "Is this democracy, then?" He immediately clarified that depending on how one conceived democracy, there were two possible answers: "Yes, and of the best, if one understands that word as a sincere love for the people, a loyal desire to mitigate social antagonisms; no, if one believes to be able to discover in it, like in so many others, alas! the slightest thought of personal interest."⁷⁹³

J.V.D.'s article is an interesting exercise in the reconciliation of democracy and elitism under the veil of patriotism. J.V.D. seems to have tried to gain acceptance for the idea that democracy did not necessarily imply sovereignty of the people but could also mean love for the people. By emphasizing the promotion of national expansion as the greatest service to the country, done out of devotion to the fatherland, J.V.D. in a way equates democracy with patriotism through the example of Caraman. As such, this member of one of the country's leading aristocratic families and of a social-professional group whose cosmopolitan reputation has often put them outside of the nation, was portrayed as a democrat and a patriot. At the same time, J.V.D. implicitly denounced those who conceived of democracy as a means to

⁷⁹³ J.V.D., "Nos Diplomates. S.A. le prince Pierre de Caraman Chimay. Envoyé extraordinaire et Ministre plénipotentiaire", *Le Home. Revue illustrée de la Famille*, 5/12, 31 December 1912, 8-10.

further self-interest. Much like, as we have seen in Chapter Three, Lichtervelde junior did in his 1905 plea for an ‘active, fertile neutrality’ written under the pseudonym of Captain Baldwin, and like Henry Davignon did very explicitly in his 1935 essay on diplomats and diplomacy, the journalist of *Le Home* reproached Belgian politicians with not serving the interests of the nation. Yet while Davignon felt confident enough to claim that the public in the 1930s admired the diplomats for their services to the country as mysterious foreign policy experts and loathed the electoral expediency that drove politicians, J.V.D. judged it wiser to influence the image of Belgian diplomats by cautiously constructing a justification of their aristocratic character and attuning it with the requirements of a society that was organised according to the principle of popular sovereignty. Again, the fact that he felt the need to do so points to the prevalence of representations that put the diplomat in an unfavourable light.

The Depiction of Diplomacy

Furthermore, unlike in the 1890s, the advocates of Belgian diplomats had to reckon with the threat of war, which exercised considerable influence on how journalists approached the system of diplomatic practice in Europe. Given that in the years before 1914 political negotiations between states were still largely conducted behind closed doors and had not prevented war from breaking out in the south-eastern part of the continent, criticisms on European diplomacy and its executors intensified.

More than other Belgian newspapers, the Socialist dailies *Le Peuple* and *Vooruit* devoted many articles, including a large number of editorials, to what their journalists believed to be the fundamental bellicosity of diplomats.⁷⁹⁴ However, not all Socialist journalists and correspondents had lost hope; some of them still seemed to believe that the inherent pacifism of the peoples, whether by way of their delegates or not, and their desire to determine their own destinies would suffice to thwart the schemes of diplomats and avert armed conflicts.⁷⁹⁵ Because of the function of *Le Peuple* and *Vooruit* as press organs of the

⁷⁹⁴ See for instance SLUYS, Maurice, “La grande illusion”, *Le Peuple*, 17 May 1911; ANONYMOUS, “Contre la Guerre. Les meetings de Berlin”, *Le Peuple*, 23 November 1911; ANONYMOUS, “La Démonstration internationale de Bruxelles”, *Le Peuple*, 31 July 1914; ANONYMOUS, “La Fédération bruxelloise du Parti ouvrier à la Population! A bas la Guerre. Capitalistes et militaristes sont à l’oeuvre”, *Le Peuple*, 1 August 1914; ANONYMOUS, “Over treinwachterschap”, *Vooruit*, 13 November 1912; ANONYMOUS, “Onze Kerstgedachten”, *Vooruit*, 27 December 1912; ANONYMOUS, “In den Balkan”, *Vooruit*, 25 Oktober 1913. Such imagery was also to be found in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, see most notably ANONYMOUS, “Amerikaansche Toestanden”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 9 December 1912.

⁷⁹⁵ VINCK, Emile, “L’église et la guerre”, *Le Peuple*, 14 July 1911; DUNOIS, Amédée, “France et Allemagne”, *Le Peuple*, 27 July 1911; ANONYMOUS, “Les députés et la paix”, *Le Peuple*, 11 August 1911; ANONYMOUS, “Contre la Guerre”, *Le Peuple*, 23 August 1911; ANONYMOUS, “Le socialisme international contre la Guerre. Les meetings de Berlin”, *Le Peuple*, 29 October 1911; ANONYMOUS, “En France”, *Le*

Belgian Workers Party and because of the close links between Socialist journalists and Socialist delegates, the message conveyed to readers of Socialist newspapers fitted perfectly in the official party discourse about diplomacy and will have surprised no one.

Since *Le Journal de Bruxelles* had strong ties with the Foreign Ministry – Davignon was one of its administrators – it was not very surprising either that its journalists drew a very different picture of European diplomacy's stance towards issues of war and peace. In an editorial published in July 1911, a journalist of *Le Journal de Bruxelles* declared that “diplomats are conscious about their responsibilities and would not have their country launch itself in a [military] adventure.”⁷⁹⁶ A few months later, one of his colleagues commented approvingly on an article published in the French nationalist, anti-liberal and antidemocratic journal *L'Action française*. This article opposed the leftist idea of the fundamentally pacifist intentions of the people, stating that while diplomats “hesitate to take up arms, the nations were getting impatient and grumbled.”⁷⁹⁷ In its regular feature *Brief uit Parijs* (Letter from Paris), which might have been written by a supporter of *L'Action française*, the Catholic daily *Gazet van Antwerpen* published similar expressions of confidence in traditional diplomacy and mistrust in “parliamentary machinations.”⁷⁹⁸

The newspaper that stood closest to the head of the Belgian government exhibited less trust in the benefits of traditional diplomacy. Yet rather than as belligerent, the journalists of *Le XXe siècle* pictured European diplomats as incapable to prevent war. Commenting on the entry of Montenegro in the Balkan wars in October 1912, one of them wrote that diplomats had “negotiated, parleyed, telegraphed, gravely dilated upon the matter”, only to find “a harrowing disillusion.” The journalist suggested that diplomats had themselves to blame, explaining that “the European concert has degenerated in a cacophony and the most brutal truth is that, if there is fire, the real arsonists... are the firemen themselves!” Like other journalists and correspondents of *Le XXe siècle*, this journalist attributed the diplomats' incompetence to maintain peace to their ignorance of local histories and their disregard of

Peuple, 18 November 1912; ANONYMOUS, “Sociaal politiek overzicht: Duitschland tegen den oorlog”, *Vooruit*, 24 Augustus 1911; ANONYMOUS, “Internationale Protestmeeting tegen den Oorlog”, *Vooruit*, 30 October 1912; ANONYMOUS, “Prachtige redevoering van Jan Jaurès”, *Vooruit*, 31 July 1914.

⁷⁹⁶ ANONYMOUS, “La politique étrangère. L'incident d'Agadir”, *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 4 July 1911.

⁷⁹⁷ ANONYMOUS, “A travers la press. La guerre, les peuples et la diplomatie”, *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 27 November 1911.

⁷⁹⁸ ANONYMOUS, “Brief uit Parijs. De afstand van de Fransche Congo”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 21 September 1911; ANONYMOUS, “Brief uit Parijs. Bijeenroeping van het Parlement”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 10 October 1911 (republished on 22 October 1911). See also ANONYMOUS, “Oorlog op den Balkan”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 2 December 1912; and ANONYMOUS, “Oorlog tusschen Oostenrijk en Servië”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 31 July 1914.

“differences of language, race, tradition and religion.”⁷⁹⁹ This judgment likely sprung from the contemporary idea that diplomats lived in complete isolation from the wider civil society in their host countries, only interacting with leading politicians and military men if these were worthy of their standing and testing their views on European politics preferably against those of their colleagues alone.⁸⁰⁰

These aspects of diplomatic practice were also criticized *La Dernière Heure*. Commenting on the incapability of diplomats to avoid war, one journalist claimed that anything could be expected from traditional diplomacy and clarified that “without wanting it, she [diplomacy] has made war; who knows if, wanting it, she will not create peace at all.”⁸⁰¹ In a cartoon (fig. 1) published in the midst of the Balkan Wars, an illustrator of the same newspaper denounced the isolationism of diplomats in their host societies and their ignorance of the intentions of national political leaders.⁸⁰²



Fig. 1: “For me there has not been war in the Balkans. The ambassador of Bulgaria assured me in September that there would be no fighting.”

⁷⁹⁹ ANONYMOUS, “Le geste héroïque des Monténégrins”, *Le XXe siècle*, 10 October 1912; ANONYMOUS, “Le geste héroïque des Monténégrins”, *Le XXe siècle*, 31 October 1913.

⁸⁰⁰ See DEVLEESHOUWER, *Les Belges*, 35-36.

⁸⁰¹ ANONYMOUS, “L’heure de la diplomatie”, *La Dernière Heure*, 4 November 1912. See also ANONYMOUS, “Les Difficultés et les Périls du Partage balkanique”, *La Dernière Heure*, 26 May 1913.

⁸⁰² SIMPLICISSIMUS, “Ces bons diplomates”, *La Dernière Heure*, 13 February 1913.

In the case of the more elitist Liberal journal *L'Indépendance belge*, Roland de Mares and Jean Bernard seem to have determined the way that the system of European diplomatic practice was framed. As we have seen, the French correspondent Bernard fiercely criticised the diplomacy of his age and ardently advocated more openness in interstate politics. Agreeing with his colleagues of *Le XXe siècle* and *La Dernière Heure*, he used the case of the Paris diplomatic corps to fulminate against “diplomats who – as if they obeyed a word of order – seclude themselves in their palaces [...], letting their grandeur wear off in the solitude and indifference of Paris, who does not know them and ignores them.”⁸⁰³ Bernard also still claimed a more active role of the press in international relations, arguing that “a diplomat who does not read the newspapers and disdains the press is like an armless gymnast and a legless waltzer.”⁸⁰⁴ The Belgian journalist Roland de Mares seems to have had little to say about the role of the press in diplomacy but did label the diplomatic ways of his age as not suited to cope with contemporary problems. According to him, “the time is gone when the superficial schemes of diplomacy were efficient to settle the most complicated situations with disregard of the peoples directly involved.” Likewise, he argued, “the time is gone when the sole will of princes sufficed to decide about peace and war.” De Mares claimed to know that “in the stage of evolution that we have attained, every nation makes its own history.”⁸⁰⁵ In other words, De Mares found that the – fundamentally historical – processes of democratization had led the public to reject traditional diplomacy.

The journalists of *Le Soir* contributed their mite to the variety of critical discourses on contemporary diplomacy. ‘Christine’ (Paul André), ‘Candide’ (Emmanuel Vossaert), ‘Silas’ (Louis Dumont-Wilden), and most notably ‘Piccolo’ (editor in chief Auguste Cauvin) denounced both the alleged immorality and bellicosity of diplomats and their suspected incompetence to prevent war, and argued for more popular participation in foreign policy-making.⁸⁰⁶ Most remarkable, however, were the comments of ‘Gringoire.’⁸⁰⁷ In July 1909, this journalist explained to the readers of *Le Soir* where – what he believed to be – the popular perception of diplomats came from. “In the eyes of the masses,” the journalist claimed, “diplomacy appears as the refuge of all the rejected and failed high-born sons, who are good

⁸⁰³ BERNARD, Jean, “Frances. Notes du Jour”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 2 August 1911.

⁸⁰⁴ BERNARD, Jean, “La Vie à Paris”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 3 June 1914.

⁸⁰⁵ DE MARES, Roland, “Dans les Balkans”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 14 October 1912. For similar comments, see DE MARES, Roland, “La France et l’Espagne”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 13 November 1911.

⁸⁰⁶ CHRISTINE, “Chronique bruxelloise”, *Le Soir*, 5 October 1911; CANDIDE, “Les Rois Tombent”, *Le Soir*, 9 October 1910; CANDIDE, “La peur d’être mouillé”, *Le Soir*, 7 July 1912; SILAS, “Le peau de l’ours”, *Le Soir*, 17 April 1914; SILAS, “La morale des Etats”, *Le Soir*, 22 July 1914; PICCOLO, “La semaine”, 15 January and 7 October 1912, and 4 May 1914.

⁸⁰⁷ This was the pseudonym of a certain Eslander. See *Annuaire de la Presse belge*, Brussels, 1910, 95.

for nothing but to occupy postings abroad which are as honorary as they are useless.” Gringoire then made an interesting distinction: “In normal times”, he wrote, people regarded the diplomat as “a burlesque character” and ridiculed him for his funny-looking costumes and decorations. “When the political horizon grows darker”, Gringoire continued, “the diplomat suddenly becomes odious” and “every conflict is attributed to him, to his intrigues and to his clumsiness.” Proceeding to the core of his argumentation, Gringoire asked his readers “why this contempt that would willingly turn into hate?” He claimed to know the answer: “Because the peoples have finally become self-conscious and it palls on them to be involved in events so grave as a war and its consequences by these pompous characters whom they have not chosen, whom they pay a lot of money and who, while they [diplomats] cannot do good to them, are capable to cause them a lot of harm.” Seemingly proud of the lucidity of his own reasoning, Gringoire concluded that “there is thus nothing surprising in that the diplomat is generally badly seen by those whom he represents abroad.”⁸⁰⁸

Gringoire’s analysis was indeed very enlightening. It comprised a wide range of charges against Belgian and other European diplomats uttered by journalists from Socialist, Catholic, and Liberal newspapers. Furthermore, it implicitly combined the specific criticisms of Belgian diplomats with those directed against diplomats of larger, non-neutral states. Much like his colleague Roland de Mares from *L’Indépendance belge*, Gringoire conveyed the message that democratization had made people, or the peoples, aware that their sovereignty extended to the domain of foreign policy and that as such they could no longer tolerate to have themselves represented by persons whom they had not delegated to do so themselves, especially since these persons proved to be highly incompetent in these matters.

Nevertheless, Gringoire did not state that he was writing about Belgian diplomats. It could be expected, however, that in the light of the approaching World War other journalists constructed similar argumentations and would explicitly apply these to Belgian diplomats. In November 1910, a journalist of the progressive Liberal daily *La Chronique* made the same distinction between the popular representations of, on the one hand, the diplomat as “a puppet who, gilded from top to toe, smiles, bows and scrapes, shows up at all the parties, and is good for nothing but that;” and, on the other hand, the diplomat as “a mysterious and fearsome being, who makes and unmakes empires, decrees war and peace, and weighs down as a nightmare on international events.” The journalist could easily reassure his readers that while the Belgian diplomatic corps certainly included some of the former, it had none of the latter.

⁸⁰⁸ GRINGOIRE, “Un fin diplomate”, *Le Soir*, 7 July 1909.

“Not one of our diplomats thinks, thank God, of troubling the peace of Europe or of destroying Asia by fire and sword,” he claimed.⁸⁰⁹

Gérard Harry, the editor in chief of the same newspaper, agreed but put the matter differently in an article published in November 1911. He knew that Belgian diplomats had long played a significant part in the development of the Asian kingdom of Siam; one of them had even served as the principal advisor to the Siamese king.⁸¹⁰ Yet in recent years, Harry regretted, “the indifference and lethargy” that pervaded “the foreign policy of the clerics” had put Belgian interests in Siam at risk. “It is clear to anyone who is not born blind,” Harry explained, “that the foreign policy of the clerics in power consists in staying far away from everything in the international domain.” The editor of *La Chronique* continued with the claim that “if a Belgian Congo has been created, if efforts have been undertaken to open markets in China, Siam, Persia, [...] to the advantage of our great industrial nation [...], that was due to the sole will and genius of Leopold II who [...] became the true Foreign Minister of his reign.” Ever since Leopold II had been forced to retire from the world scene, the future had not been looking bright, Harry found. As long as foreign policy making resided in men who were only concerned with pleasing voters and who knew nothing about world affairs, that is “until the accession to office of a patriotic ministry of the Left”, Harry argued, the new “King Albert will find himself abandoned to his mere inspirations and initiatives.” Yet there was another reason why the future of Belgium looked dark, Harry suggested elsewhere in his article. Comparing the attitude that Belgian diplomacy adopted towards the kingdom of Siam with the way it acted in relations with the country’s neighbours, the journalist stated that “it goes without saying that in case this summer our Belgium is caught red-handed in a state of impotence towards the eventuality of a brusque and terrible invasion, [...] the fault [...] lies above all with the regulators of our relations with foreign countries.”⁸¹¹ Harry clearly felt the threat of war looming ahead. This certainly had a lot to do with the fact that he wrote these words in the wake of the Second Moroccan Crisis, which during the summer of 1911 increased tensions between Germany and France and shook Belgian public opinion.⁸¹² “It is the task of the Foreign Ministry”, he declared, “to always cock its ears, to know or foresee

⁸⁰⁹ J.H., “Nos représentants à l’étranger”, *La Chronique*, 18 November 1910.

⁸¹⁰ See VERSCHAEREN, Jozef, “Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns, in DE SCHRYVER, *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, 2644-2645. See also the document collections edited by Walter TIPS: TIPS, Walter, *Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns and the Belgian advisers in Siam (1892-1902)*, Bangkok, 1992; and TIPS, Walter, *Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns and the Making of modern Siam: The Diaries and Letters of King Chulalongkorn's General Adviser*, Bangkok, 1996.

⁸¹¹ HARRY, Gérard, “Nos nouvelles de la nuit. On demande une politique étrangère”, *La Chronique*, 7 November 1911.

⁸¹² See BITSCH, *La Belgique*, 423-444.

everything that is devised abroad, and to draw the attention of both Parliament and the army leadership to the dangers and eventualities that require safety measures and patriotic efforts of national conversation.”⁸¹³

Gérard Harry’s article elucidates several important aspects of the depiction of Belgian diplomacy in the light of the approaching First World War. First, it goes deeper into a theme that appeared as well in articles published in other newspapers in the years before August 1914, namely that of Belgian diplomats being incapable of warning the country for conflict situations at the country’s borders. Reflecting like Harry on the Second Moroccan Crisis, a journalist of *La Gazette* claimed that “a lot of people are asking the question ... why our diplomacy has not foreseen this.”⁸¹⁴ More than a year later, during another period of Franco-German tensions that closely involved Belgian military reforms, the editors of *Het Laatste Nieuws* even went as far as to write an open letter to the Minister of War (and Head of the government) Charles de Broqueville, stating that “your diplomats, Dear Sir Minister, should have informed You about the intentions of England, France and Germany towards Belgium.”⁸¹⁵

Second, while the incapability thesis found a wide resonance among Belgian journalists, Harry’s article also reveals a mind-set that was present in a smaller but still significant number of journalists. It could perhaps best be described as the Belgian imperialist strictures on Belgian diplomacy. Journalists that were imbued with this line of thought attributed the deficiencies of the country’s diplomacy to the kind of neutrality that Belgian foreign policy executives incited to restrict political relations with Europe and the rest of the world to an absolute minimum, for fear of provoking the anger of one of Belgium’s mighty neighbours. Journalists who adhered to the Greater Belgium ideology not only felt that such diplomatic behaviour threatened the country’s overseas interests, but also believed that it would leave Belgium indefensible against the foreign aggression which – they seemed to believe – was inevitable. While in the years before the First World War, not only journalists of most Liberal newspapers but also those of the neutral *Le Soir* and the Catholic *Le XXe siècle* manifested elements of this mind-set, it appeared most clearly in the newspaper led by Gérard Harry.⁸¹⁶

⁸¹³ HARRY, “Nos nouvelles”.

⁸¹⁴ ANONYMOUS, “Le gouvernement”, *La Gazette*, 10 October 1911.

⁸¹⁵ ANONYMOUS, “Hunne verantwoordelikheden”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 10 December 1912.

⁸¹⁶ Opposing voices against the combination of colonialism and militarism were to be heard most loudly in *Le Patriote*, which was the Catholic journal with the widest circulation, in the progressive Liberal daily *La Réforme*, and in the press organs of the Socialist Party. On Belgian press attitudes towards colonialism, see VIAENE, “King Leopold’s Imperialism”, 767-775; and STENGERS, Jean, *Belgique et Congo: L’élaboration de la Charte*

The search for these ‘imperialist’ journalists leads us back to ‘Bob’, or Léon Souguenet. His memoirs published in 1919 lead one to suspect that Gérard Harry functioned for Souguenet and several of his colleagues as some kind of mentor.⁸¹⁷ In the decades before the First World War, Harry had been editor in chief of successively *L’Indépendance belge* (until 1898), of *Le Petit Bleu* (until 1908) and of *La Chronique*.⁸¹⁸ As such, he had taken quite a few junior journalists under his wing. Among them Souguenet and Louis Dumont-Wilden, aka Silas, with whom Souguenet founded *Pourquoi Pas?* in 1910. Both worked under Harry for *L’Indépendance belge*, while Dumont-Wilden followed him to *Le Petit Bleu* and Souguenet found him again at *La Chronique*.⁸¹⁹

In his memoirs, Souguenet related how he conceived Belgian foreign policy before the First World War in a discourse that contains nearly all the elements that Harry put in his 1911 article. This discourse bears a lot of similarities as well with that of diplomats of the Congo generation. Souguenet complained about the lack of patriotism of most Belgians and about the fact that most parliamentarians always fought each other over domestic issues instead of uniting and looking abroad. His great example was Leopold II, “the most misunderstood of European sovereigns” who “was his own Foreign Minister”, “attached a great empire to a small kingdom” and “while pursuing this project with an indomitable will, never lost sight of the defence of the kingdom.” Throughout his memoirs, Souguenet repeatedly stressed the Second Belgian King’s philosophies of imperialism and militarism which he believed made Leopold II into a great monarch. According to Souguenet, this “great visionary patriot” remained passionate, vehement, powerful, vigorous – and many other qualities associated with a strong and lively body – until the day he died. Souguenet, his friend Dumont-Wilden and their mentor Gérard Harry took it upon themselves to pursue the legacy of Leopold II. Souguenet and Dumont-Wilden decided to look abroad as well and even took a study trip to Alsace-Lorraine, which resulted in a joint publication that commended a people that lived on the border of two cultures – and indirectly glorified the Belgian nation as well. Furthermore, they organized different conferences with a view to radically propagating the brotherhood of

coloniale, Brussels, 1963, 160-165. On Belgian press attitudes towards militarism, see DEVLEESHOUWER, *Les Belges*, 128-133, 172-173, 177, 181, 191, and 336-340; BITSCH, *Les Belges*, 373-376, 380, 407-408, 424 and 465.

⁸¹⁷ This conclusion is drawn on the basis of the contents of Souguenet’s memoirs. The mentorship aspect is more explicit in the memoirs of Souguenet’s close friend and colleague George Garnir, and in the preface of these memoirs written by Louis Dumont-Wilden. See DUMONT-WILDEN, Louis (ed.), *George Garnir. Souvenirs d’un journaliste*, Brussels, 1959, 9-12 and 72-82. See also DUMONT-WILDEN, Louis, “Le *Pourquoi Pas?* a 50 ans”, *Pourquoi Pas?*, 2164, 20 May 1960, 5.

⁸¹⁸ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieu de presse*, 144-145.

⁸¹⁹ BERTELSON, *Dictionnaire*, 48-49 and 108.

the Belgian people with the French, despite the risk they ran “to trouble the diplomats.” These initiatives, Souguenet argued (with hindsight), reminded public opinion that Belgian “moral life” was solidary with that of the French. More importantly, Souguenet asserted, these conferences and their media coverage “removed a dangerous conception of neutrality as lethargy, indifference, immobility” and “softly shook dormant sympathies awake in the masses.”⁸²⁰

Their concern for the sympathies of the masses does not, however, mean that they felt part of the masses. According to Pierre Van den Dungen, Harry and the ‘Three Musketeers’, as Souguenet, Dumont-Wilden and George Garnir, the third founder of *Pourquoi Pas?*, called themselves, were actually social conservatives who defended “the distinctive preservation of the Liberal French-speaking bourgeoisie that feared the abolition of its privileges because of the rise of the masses.” As journalists, they wished to regain their independence from the mass newspapers which danced to the piping of “the immense mob of readers and clients of publicity.”⁸²¹ On a social and political level, they seem to have felt elevated above the masses and convinced of the need guide them towards an active kind of patriotism. They seemed to have shared this conception with many diplomats of the Congo generation.

In this regard, it is telling that a journalist like Gérard Harry, who was one of the earliest and fiercest supporters of Leopold II’s colonial oeuvre, did not fulminate against Belgian ‘diplomats’, several of whom he knew shared his ideas about the intimate connection between patriotism and Belgian ‘national’ expansion. As editor in chief of *L’Indépendance belge*, Harry had come into close contact with those Belgian diplomats who actively contributed to the King’s imperial oeuvre and to whom he proposed to deploy the columns of *L’Indépendance belge* in the service of the colonial cause. During his successive career as director of *Le Petit Bleu*, Harry had even been urged by the King’s entourage, which feared hostility from the British press, to slightly dampen his colonial enthusiasm.⁸²² In his article written as editor in chief of *La Chronique*, Harry directed his criticisms against Belgian ‘diplomacy’. By this he most likely meant the persons who directed the Belgian foreign policy of neutrality. These were the Political Director Léon Arendt and the Belgian minister in Berlin, Jules Greindl. Between the death of Lambermont in 1905 and their nearly simultaneous retirement in the Spring of 1912, the country’s diplomatic position essentially sprung from the dialogue between these men, both of whom clung to a strict interpretation of

⁸²⁰ SOUGUENET, *Témoignages*, 15, 23-31, 67-77, 84-88, 117-119, and 182.

⁸²¹ VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Milieux de presse*, 435-459 (the quotes are on pp. 438-439).

⁸²² MEUWISSEN, Eric, “Le Petit Bleu de Gérard Harry (1894-1908)”, *BTNG*, 15 (1-2), 1984, 142-143, 154-155 and 156-161; VAN DER LINDEN, Fred, “HARRY (Gérard), Journaliste”, *BCB*, 3, 1952, 419-425.

neutrality. Arendt and Greindl believed that this was Belgium's surest safeguard against any invasion. As long-time dean of the diplomatic corps, Greindl's ideas had pervaded those of many of his colleagues, while the dominance of Arendt's presence in the Foreign Ministry had resorted the same effect on many functionaries.⁸²³ Yet, Harry surely knew, not on all diplomats nor on all administrative personnel.

Harry would also have known that Arendt and Greindl constituted important parts of the counterbalance against those leading circles that wished to combine Belgian imperialism with building a strong army, entering into military coalitions and even providing the country with strategic borders such as the Rhine and the Scheldt. According to Els Witte, these circles included Belgian military leaders, big bankers, a few Catholic top politicians, and of course, until his death in 1909, Leopold II and his entourage.⁸²⁴ Remarkably enough, Harry projects the mental dispositions of these circles on the young King Albert, thus presupposing a cleavage in foreign policy ideology between the King and the men who directed the Foreign Ministry. If the King would be supported by a 'patriotic' Cabinet, Harry indeed suggested, he could achieve the same 'greatness' for the country as his predecessor. Albert certainly advocated the reinforcement of the military but, as we have seen, did not share Leopold II's imperialist outlook and, guided in foreign policy issues first by Lambermont and later by Van der Elst, clung to a strict interpretation of neutrality. After the First World War erupted, this was bound to put him, and the large majority of Belgian diplomats who shared the King's opinion, at odds with those advocates of a Greater Belgium who would plead for the abandonment of neutrality and for territorial expansion at the expense of not only Germany, but also the Netherlands and Luxemburg.

In the decades before the First World War, several Belgian journalists had set sail towards Diplomatic Island. They seem to have been drawn to this mysterious place by the urge to learn more about the men who lived there. Devoting most of their attention to the Belgian resort and observing its inhabitants from afar, the most critical of these journalists believed they discerned an elitist group of men who seemed to be at leisure all the time, lavishly spending the peoples' hard-earned money. Furthermore, it seemed as if these men were not doing – out of unwillingness or incompetence? – what they were paid for, namely safeguarding the Belgian nation's prosperity against foreign competition. Sailing closer towards the shore, many journalists on the one hand felt confident that their perceptions from

⁸²³ BITSCH, *La Belgique*, 249-253; DEVLEESHOUWER, *Les Belges*, 37-49.

⁸²⁴ WITTE, *Politieke geschiedenis*, 155-156.

afar were actually quite accurate and some of them feared that the incompetence of the Belgian resort's inhabitants could have disastrous consequences. On the other hand, from the clearer picture that Belgian journalists had obtained several of them deduced that not all Belgian diplomats were alike, and that some diplomats even shared with them assumptions about how the Belgian nation's interest could best be defended. However, as these journalists might have regretted, their like-minded diplomats were not the ones that decided about which policy to adopt towards other resorts on Diplomatic Island.

Conversely, the inhabitants of the Belgian resort certainly noticed the rising activity on the waters that surrounded their habitat. While travelling to the other Diplomatic Islands for meetings with foreign colleagues, they sometimes encountered the sailing journalists and felt the threat to their traditional way of life which emanated from these self-declared representatives of the people. Most of them abided by the trusty method of ignoring these journalists. Luckily for Belgian diplomats, there were still places where they could temporarily evade what many of them considered as the subversive activities of both foreign and domestic journalists. Baron Beyens, who will be the protagonist of Part Three, wrote in mid-July 1914 to his wife that "I would be most satisfied to go to relax in Carlsbad and to read something else than tasteless articles of newspapers that magnify all the events and publish false items, not having true ones to serve to their readers."⁸²⁵ Apparently, it did not register with Beyens that a fatal gunshot in Sarajevo two weeks earlier was bound to queer his pitch.

⁸²⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 15 July 1914.

PART III
THE RUIN OF THE OLD HOUSE. STRUGGLES FOR THE CONTROL OF
BELGIAN DIPLOMACY DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND ITS
AFTERMATH.

In his diary entry of 4 July 1914, the American legation secretary Hugh S. Gibson, who had arrived in Brussels from Havana only months before, wrote that “after years of hard work and revolutions and wars and rumours of war, the change to this quiet post has been most welcome and I have wallowed in the luxury of having time to play. For the last year or two I have looked forward to just such a post as this, where nothing ever happens, where there is no earthly chance of being called out of bed in the middle of the night to see the human race brawling over its differences.” Yet less than a month later Gibson reported that “the roof has fallen in”, that “the hatches have been battened down”, and that “nobody can see where it will all lead.”⁸²⁶

Gibson’s light-hearted existence in Brussels abruptly ended when the German government sent its army across the border with Belgium in early August 1914. This violation of Belgian neutrality by one of the country’s Guarantors contributed to turning the Third Balkan War, which had erupted when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia only days before, into the First World War.⁸²⁷ For the next four years, France and Great-Britain, allied in the Triple Entente, fought alongside Belgium on the Western Front, while Russia, the third member of the Entente, faced both Germany and its neighbour Austria-Hungary on the Eastern Front. Since many of the countries involved controlled overseas territories, scenes of war took place outside of Europe as well. In Central-Africa, military forces carrying a Belgian flag fought to maintain – and preferably increase – Belgium’s colonial empire. Throughout history, victorious wars had nearly always led to territorial gains, and this thought pervaded the minds of many policy-makers at the onset of the First World War.

So too in Belgium, or more precisely in Sainte-Adresse, the borough of the French city Le Havre where most members of the Belgian government had fled to in October 1914. Charles de Broqueville, head of the government in exile and Minister of War, had set up office in a small village near Dunkirk in order to be nearer to the front and closer to the King in the Belgian coastal town De Panne. King Albert had indeed refused to leave the Belgian

⁸²⁶ GIBSON, Hugh S., *A Journal From Our Legation in Belgium*, New York, 1917, 3-4.

⁸²⁷ For an overview of recent historiography on the First World War and its origins, see MOMBAUER, “The First World War”, 78-95. On life in Belgium during that period, see DE SCHAEFDRIJVER, Sophie, *De Grootte Oorlog: het Koninkrijk België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, Amsterdam, 1997.

soil and would spent the remaining years of the war on the small piece of the country's territory that was never occupied by the German army. To a certain extent, the three hundred kilometres that separated the King from most members of the government symbolized the wide mental distance between both representatives of Belgium's executive power. While the King wished to preserve Belgian neutrality as the best means to restore the country's territorial integrity with a limited number of casualties in the Belgian army, the susceptibility of several ministers to the idea that the war provided unique opportunities to enlarge the territory of the Belgian state within Europe incited them to urge for the abandonment of neutrality and for the conclusion of an alliance with France and Great-Britain.

The resulting struggle for the reins of Belgian foreign policy has led to passionate discussions among historians of different denominations and nationalities.⁸²⁸ Belgian diplomats are largely absent from their narratives.⁸²⁹ We indeed know very little of how those employed by the House in the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island perceived this struggle and how they reacted to the challenges posed by it. While historians have on the one hand tended to downplay the agency of Belgian diplomats and Foreign Ministry officials in the shaping and conduct of Belgian foreign policy during the First World War and its aftermath, they have virtually to inquire into the impact of the struggle between the King and the government upon their self-perceptions and loyalties as foreign policy executives and careerists. Yet the challenges they faced were huge also in this field. The years between the outbreak of war in

⁸²⁸ The most important works since 1975 are HELMREICH, Jonathan, *Belgium and Europe. A Study in Small State Diplomacy*, New Haven, 1976; PALO, Michael F., *The Diplomacy of Belgian War Aims during the First World War*, unpublished PhD-thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 1977, published on demand by University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, 1978; WILLEQUET, Jacques, *Albert I. Koning der Belgen*. Amsterdam, 1979; MARKS, Sally, *Innocent Abroad. Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, Chapel Hill, 1981; SCHEPENS, Luc, *Koning Albert, Charles de Broqueville en de Vlaamse Beweging tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, Tielt, 1982; THOMAS, Daniel H., *The guarantee of Belgian independence and neutrality in European diplomacy, 1830's-1930's*, Kingston, 1983; DE WAELE, Maria, *Naar een groter België. De Belgische territoriale eisen tijdens en na de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, unpublished PhD-thesis, Universiteit Gent, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 1989; HAAG, Henri, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville, Ministre d'État, et les luttes pour le pouvoir (1910-1940)*, Brussels, 1990; THIELEMANS, Marie-Rose, "Albert entre guerre et paix", in Marie-Rose THIELEMANS (ed.), *Albert Ier. Carnets et correspondance de guerre, 1917-1918*, Paris, 1991, 19-172; VELAERS, Jan, *Albert I. Koning in tijden van crisis*, Tielt, 2009.

⁸²⁹ This is with the exception of the role Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens played as Minister of Foreign Affairs. His term of office, ad interim from the summer of 1915 onwards, and then officially from January 1916 to July 1917, did attract some attention in the narratives of these writings, in which Beyens often played an important supporting role. Seemingly, dissatisfaction with the way Beyens was portrayed in previous historiography incited his son Antoine, a former diplomat himself, to rewrite the history of his father's activities as Foreign Minister during the First World War. See BEYENS, Antoine, *Un diplomate belge au service de son pays: le baron Beyens, ministre des affaires étrangères, 1915-1917*, Brussels, 1981. Some attention has also gone to the replacement of Baron Maximilien d'Erp as head of the Belgian legation to the Holy See. Much of this literature is written in an apologetic vein, glorifying the actions of D'Erp (see for instance DUMOULIN, *La carrière diplomatique du baron Maximilien d'Erp*, part two; and VAN DER STRATEN-WAILLET, François-Xavier, "Présence diplomatique belge près le Saint-Siège: 1832-1914", *Revue Générale*, 1982, 63-65) or justifying those of the Papacy (see DE VOLDER, Jan, *Benoit XV et la Belgique durant la grande guerre*, Brussels, 1996, 60-63).

August 1914 and the signing of the last of five peace treaties in August 1920 witnessed many unforeseen diplomatic movements that made and – more frequently – broke the careers of diplomats, and that even led to the appointment and subsequent dismissal of one senior diplomat, Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Part Three aims to fill these important lacuna's in Belgian diplomatic historiography by reconstructing how in this framework a number of key Belgian diplomats developed ideas, perceived interests, and acted on both.

In all, four different men headed the Department throughout the war years and its immediate aftermath. Julien Davignon remained Foreign Minister until the summer of 1915, when he was succeeded – the first six months *ad interim* – by Beyens, who left the Foreign Ministry in August 1917. After a brief *intermezzo* by Cabinet Chief Charles de Broqueville, Paul Hymans took over in January 1918. The Liberal leader offered his resignation in August 1920. The ministerships of these four men will serve as the structuring frames of this Part, which studies the political take-over of diplomacy from the diplomats' perspective.

However, studying these manoeuvres most effectively requires taking into account the actions of journalists as well. Baron Beyens, who had wished to temporarily ignore the writings of journalists in the summer of 1914, found himself as member of the government during part of the wartime in a situation that went beyond his worst expectations. “The Belgian Government,” he wrote in a letter to the King, “is obliged to live in Sainte-Adresse in a vile promiscuity with journalists, the propagators of all kinds of rumours, even the falsest ones, real venomous flies that are difficult to get rid of.”⁸³⁰ In order to do justice to this “promiscuity” between politicians and journalists (or more broadly, publicists), Part Three studies the attitudes towards Belgian diplomats of the country's journalists in conjunction with those of Belgian politicians. As we will see, not only did journalists and publicists try to engage in politics, but also politicians made more and more use of the press to criticize Belgian diplomats and diplomacy. Conversely, some diplomats themselves started recurring to the media to express their opinions. The outbreak of war indeed put the traditional rules of diplomatic behaviour under review.

⁸³⁰ AKP, AE, n° 39, “Beyens”, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert de Belgique, 7 November 1916.

CHAPTER 6. THE END OF THE ANCIEN RÉGIME

On New Years' Day 1915, Broqueville wrote to his colleague Julien Davignon: "You have urged me many times to have patience when I uttered my indignation (in slightly strong terms perhaps) about the insufficiency of Belgium's representatives in Rome, Paris and London. I have also expressed my fears as to The Hague." Broqueville explained that the hard times that Belgium was facing compelled its government to do all it could to obtain full reparations. This apparently required the replacement of diplomats who were unable to "render the services to the country that we have more than the right to demand from our representatives." Stressing that "as head of the government I have special duties in matters that concern the government's responsibility", Broqueville insisted that Davignon replaced Baron Maximilien d'Erp at the Holy See by the Catholic former Justice Minister and law professor Jules van den Heuvel, Baron Paul Guillaume in Paris by Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, who had left his posting in Berlin at the outbreak of war, and Count Charles de Lalaing in London by the Liberal Party leader Paul Hymans. To head the legation in The Hague, Broqueville proposed Prince Albert de Ligne. Aware that Ligne was not even a minister resident yet and ranked only sixth in years of service amongst advisors, Broqueville argued that "these are not the times when it could be expedient to place [diplomats] according to seniority."⁸³¹

If Broqueville's requests were to materialize, two principles of Belgian diplomacy came under pressure. On the one hand, the principle of seniority provided the guaranty that the diplomats' investments in time and money would eventually pay off in the form of the social and cultural prestige that accompanied the title of minister plenipotentiary in one of Belgium's top legations. What was this perspective still worth if even the most intelligent investors could be robbed of their yields just like that? In London, Paris, and Rome, diplomats like Lalaing, Guillaume, and d'Erp enjoyed the crowning glory of their careers, but these crowns would be taken from them if they would simply be brushed aside, especially if they were replaced by politicians and long before their age of retirement. On the other hand, Broqueville seemed to act by his own initiative, convinced that his functions as Cabinet Chief entailed authority over diplomatic personnel policies. Prior to the war, these powers had accrued to the Foreign Minister and to the King. Yet, as we have seen, Albert refrained from

⁸³¹ AMBZ, 12.978, "Réorganisation des services extérieurs", Représentation diplomatique en 1915, à Paris, à Londres, à Rome, et à La Haye (Confidentiel), Charles de Broqueville to Julien Davignon, 1 January 1915. This letter has been referred to in HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 361-362; and summarily dealt with in SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 29-30. Schepens also briefly discusses Davignon's reply.

setting his seal on diplomatic appointments to the extent that his predecessors had done. Nevertheless, one wonders if the King would have really let this happen to the men who had served the dynasty for many decades.

§ 1. Killing Four Birds with Two Stones

The Elimination of Baron Maximilien d'Erp

In his reply to Broqueville, Davignon claimed to feel completely stunned by his friend's letter. Subtly invoking the traditional authority in such matters, he agreed that diplomats who were "unworthy of the King's thrust" had to be removed from active service. Davignon wished to examine Broqueville's requests one by one. He acknowledged that the age of Baron d'Erp, who was sixty-seven years old and the Nestor of the diplomats under discussion, caused him to no longer possess a "sufficiently complete and topical knowledge of the Belgian interests to defend in the presence of a new Pope."⁸³²

As his reasoning reveals, Davignon most likely used the argument of age to soften his implicit message, namely that he had understood why Broqueville wanted D'Erp replaced. In the eyes of many prominent Belgians, the diplomat had indeed long done what could be labelled as 'going native'. About half a century later, this phenomenon was described in the theory of diplomatic loyalties developed by the social scientists Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge. They argued that loyalty depends on identification, which is largely a function of the volume of meaningful interaction with other people. In the diplomats' case, a shift in loyalty from their home countries to their host countries is more likely to take place the longer they stay in the same post, because in the latter they generally enjoy the highest status available, outside the very summit of the political world that is. This sometimes contrasts with their situation at home, where every diplomat is just one among many and has to compete continuously with his or her peers for the favour of the Foreign Minister and, especially in the Belgian case, of the King. As time goes by, this could lead diplomats to become, on the one hand, alienated from their home countries and their foreign policy. On the other hand, it could make them feel grateful and obliged towards the institutions that have held them in such high regard for so long.⁸³³ In the case of Baron d'Erp, who was accredited to the Holy See since early 1896, these institutions were personified by the Pope and by the

⁸³² AMBZ, 12.978, "Réorganisation des services extérieurs", Représentation diplomatique en 1915, à Paris, à Londres, à Rome, et à La Haye (Confidentiel), Julien Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, 7 January 1915.

⁸³³ GALTUNG and RUGE, "Patterns of Diplomacy", 113-116.

Holy See's Foreign Minister, the Cardinal State Secretary. Surely, the phenomenon described by Galtung and Ruge gains a somewhat different dimension when dealing with diplomats sent to the leader of Catholicism in the early twentieth century. Ever since Belgium had re-established diplomatic relations with the Holy See in 1884, the government had only sent devoted Catholics to the Vatican.⁸³⁴ These men were naturally more liable to experience conflicting loyalties when their religious and moral guide acted counter to their home country's interests.

This happened in the first months of the Great War, when the Papacy refused to condemn the German army's invasion of Belgium. Under Pie X, who succeeded to Leo XIII in 1903 and died a few weeks after the war had broken out, the Holy See had hardened its anti-modern and anti-liberal stance. As such, it felt more affinity with the Central Powers and their conservative ways of politics, than with anticlerical France, protestant Britain and orthodox Russia. Pie X's successor Benedict XV was also considered by many to have more sympathy for Germany and especially Catholic Austria-Hungary than for the Entente Powers. In the meantime, large sections of public opinion in neutral, Catholic Belgium felt increasingly dismayed that no explicit and public disapproval of the country's violation was forthcoming from the Vatican. Especially Catholic politicians, who feared that this situation would lead to the Catholic Party's loss of authority, looked for explanations and solutions.⁸³⁵

One explanation, advanced by the Christian Democratic MP Auguste Mélot in a French newspaper article and seemingly shared by officials at the Political Direction of the Belgian Foreign Ministry, was that Baron d'Erp had become so estranged of Belgium that he failed to grasp the agony that the country was going through and did not try hard enough to obtain "a spectacular redress" from the Pope.⁸³⁶ Mélot's words gained weight by the fact that, together with the Liberal Georges Lorand and the Socialist Jules Destrée, he was sent on a special mission by the government in Le Havre to convince the Italian public of the innocence of the small but very Catholic Belgian nation that was brought under the yoke of its big barbarian neighbour. Of this triumvirate of ad hoc diplomats, Mélot evidently took charge of contacts with Catholic Italian milieus and might thus have directly witnessed the activities of Baron d'Erp.⁸³⁷ According to his biographer Michel Dumoulin, Baron d'Erp was by then

⁸³⁴ See VAN DER STRATEN-WAILLET, François-Xavier, "Présence diplomatique belge près le Saint-Siège: 1832-1914", *Revue Générale*, January 1982, 3-19 and March 1982, 47-65.

⁸³⁵ DE VOLDER, *Benoit XV*, 22-39 and 55-63; PEEMANS, Françoise, "Tensions dans les relations belgo-vaticanes en 1914-1918. La conciliation difficile des nationalismes et des intérêts catholiques en Europe", *Risorgimento*, XXI, 1979, 178-180.

⁸³⁶ DUMOULIN, *La carrière diplomatique du baron Maximilien d'Erp*, 337

⁸³⁷ DE VOLDER, *Benoit XV*, 33-35; DAVIGNON, *Souvenirs*, 268-269.

“more than ever convinced of the pointlessness of the Belgian claims.”⁸³⁸ This conviction certainly contributed to the negative perception of him by Broqueville and his political associates. The solution would be to replace D’Erp by Jules van den Heuvel. Immediately after he finished his letter to Davignon, Broqueville wrote to Van den Heuvel in order to convince him to go to Rome. Seemingly trying to capitalize on widespread assumptions about Belgian diplomats, he described Baron d’Erp as “a man who is not only useless to the country but also exposes it to suffer damages.” To these charges, which also constituted an implicit appeal to Van den Heuvel’s patriotism, Broqueville then added the prospect of participation in the future peace conference. “The value of the heads of the great legations will greatly contribute to assuring a good position for Belgium when the peace will be discussed”, he stated, hinting that “most likely, we will chose our negotiators among them.”⁸³⁹ If Van den Heuvel accepted, which he did, Broqueville would kill two birds with one stone. Not only had Van den Heuvel lived the Belgian life during the first months of the war and would his authority as an expert in international law enable him to plead the Belgian case more effectively, appointing him in Rome would also allow Broqueville to more directly impose his views on Davignon, for Van den Heuvel had acted as the Foreign Minister’s influential advisor ever since the war broke out.⁸⁴⁰

Davignon eventually agreed to the necessity of sending Van den Heuvel to the Holy See, and ordered Secretary-General Van der Elst to recall Baron d’Erp. In his letter to d’Erp, Van der Elst invoked the increased influence of public opinion on diplomacy since the outbreak of war, and suggested that this situation necessitated the diplomat’s removal from the Vatican. “You do not ignore that public opinion in Belgium expected to find in Rome energetic advocates [of the Belgian cause]”, Van der Elst wrote, acknowledging that “the hesitations of diplomacy are not easily recognized by a people of simple and robust faith, especially when it suffers unjustly.” After informing Baron d’Erp that many in Belgium found it “indispensable to send to Rome a statesman who has lived in the country throughout the events day by day,” the Secretary-General pointed out to him that “this movement of opinion is irresistible” and that “the government will not resist it.” Of course, Van der Elst was well aware what consequences the government’s decision had for Baron d’Erp’s social position,

⁸³⁸ DUMOULIN, *La carrière diplomatique du baron Maximilien d’Erp*, 338.

⁸³⁹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers J. Van den Heuvel”, n° 99, Charles de Broqueville to Jules Van den Heuvel, 1 January 1915.

⁸⁴⁰ See SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 29-30.

and therefore added that “the government will evidently recompense both the services you have rendered during your long career and the sacrifice you will make by ending it.”⁸⁴¹

However, Baron d’Erp chose not to resign to his fate. Despite the ‘very confidential’ label written on Van der Elst’s letter, D’Erp took it straight to the Cardinal Secretary of State, who informed the Pope about its contents. Adopting a rhetoric intended to suit the diplomat’s sentiments of besmirched honour, Benedict XV first stated that he would not receive D’Erp’s successor, but afterwards mitigated his statement, promising to treat the new Belgian diplomat as a stranger. D’Erp forwarded the Pope’s response to Davignon. In the covering letter, he insisted on his devotion to his country and claimed to feel particularly insulted that Van der Elst had questioned his patriotism.⁸⁴² As such, Baron d’Erp forced the Belgian government to undertake a diplomatic demarche in order to reassure the Pope that the replacement was not directed against the Holy See, but rather aimed at meeting the demands of Belgian public opinion. In the meantime, however, the Papacy had – albeit very implicitly – condemned the German army’s invasion of Belgium and expressed its sympathy with the Belgians. Furthermore, although the Belgian government continued to urge for an explicit denunciation, it witnessed with satisfaction that Van den Heuvel’s mission to the Holy See was swiftly approved by the Pope and that he received a warm welcome.⁸⁴³ In a way, Baron d’Erp’s manoeuvre had compelled the Vatican to send such non-verbal message to the Belgian government. Perhaps this was the kind of patriotism that, as D’Erp claimed, had pervaded his entire career.

Unfortunately for him, Davignon and Broqueville did not recognize it as such. While the former felt “that I cannot recommend Baron d’Erp to the benevolence of the King for an honorary distinction”, the latter called D’Erp’s behaviour “downright treason of the national interest for the benefit of his person” and urged Davignon once more “to pension him off.”⁸⁴⁴ The Foreign Minister eventually decided, with the King’s approval, to let D’Erp know that his “inconsiderate demarche” was “poorly appreciated”, but did allow him to remain a member of the diplomatic corps until he turned seventy years old and could ordinarily be retired.⁸⁴⁵

⁸⁴¹ AMBZ, PF 107, “Maximilien d’Erp”, Léon van der Elst to Maximilien d’Erp, 19 January 1915.

⁸⁴² AMBZ, PF 107, “Maximilien d’Erp”, Pietro Gasparri to Maximilien d’Erp, 26 January 1915; Maximilien d’Erp to Julien Davignon, 27 January 1915.

⁸⁴³ DE VOLDER, *Benoît XV*, 51-55 and 60-63. On the mission of Van den Heuvel, see PEEMANS, Françoise, *L’ambassade de Belgique au Vatican pendant la première Guerre mondiale. J. Van den Heuvel à Rome, mars 1915-novembre 1918*, unpublished Master’s Thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 1974.

⁸⁴⁴ AKP, AE, n° 225, Julien Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, 2 February 1915; Charles de Broqueville to Julien Davignon, 3 February 1915.

⁸⁴⁵ AKP, AE, n° 225, Julien Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, 5 February 1915; DUMOULIN, *La carrière diplomatique du baron Maximilien d’Erp*, 341-342 and 375-376.

D'Erp nevertheless continued to express his dissatisfaction, both in a letter to the Foreign Minister and by making comments in an interview granted to an Italian newspaper. This interview put the Belgian government in a difficult position. D'Erp used his answers to the questions of the Italian journalist to express his satisfaction that the Belgian army was continuously reinforced by young Belgians who managed to leave Belgium via Holland and could then escape to England and eventually arrive at the Belgian army's side of the front. The Political Director noted that D'Erp's actions would lead the German government to strengthen border controls and to reproach the Netherlands with violating their neutrality. Davignon wryly remarked "Seen. R.I.P."⁸⁴⁶ This was indeed the end of Baron Maximilien d'Erp's diplomatic career.

The old diplomat clearly felt resentful towards the people who had so profoundly humiliated him. Upon his arrival in the Vatican, his successor Van den Heuvel noticed that Baron d'Erp had "a bleeding heart" and would soon try to just vanish from Rome, "not wanting anyone to shake his hand at his departure."⁸⁴⁷ D'Erp never returned to Belgium. Instead, he went to the estates of his wife's family in the French Dordogne, where he retired in anonymity. Yet his grudge towards the Belgian government gained the upper hand at least one more time. In late 1917, the *Comité Belge de Secours aux Réfugiés* (Belgian Committee for Refugee Relief) asked the mayor of the Dordogne village where d'Erp resided for information about him. Much displeased with this request, the retired diplomat picked up his pen and demanded from Broqueville that the Belgian government would not treat him as a 'refugee'.⁸⁴⁸ As if his honour had not been tarnished enough, d'Erp seemed to be suggesting.

Despite his sentiments of humiliation, Baron d'Erp did not show any hostility towards his successor upon the latter's arrival in Rome. On the contrary, he adopted "a very benevolent attitude" towards Van den Heuvel.⁸⁴⁹ This certainly had to do with the diplomat's wish to show greatness in defeat and thus manifest his personal dignity. Yet in the eyes of Baron d'Erp, Van den Heuvel's prestige as an extra-parliamentary expert in international law and renowned diplomatic advisor might have also contributed to rendering him more acceptable as a successor, or might have at least gilded the pill.⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴⁶ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 20, Léon van der Elst to Jules Ingenbleek, 7 March 1915; AMBZ, PF 107, "Maximilien d'Erp", Extraits de Presse. La Corriere della Sera, 16 March 1915; Note of Direction P, 20 March 1915.

⁸⁴⁷ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n°122, Jules Van den Heuvel to Léon Van der Elst.

⁸⁴⁸ See DUMOULIN, *La carrière diplomatique du baron Maximilien d'Erp*, 343.

⁸⁴⁹ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n°122, Jules Van den Heuvel to Léon Van der Elst.

⁸⁵⁰ See also THIELEMANS, Marie-Rose, "Albert de l'enfance à la maturité", in Marie-Rose THIELEMANS and Emile VANDEWOUDE (eds.), *Le Roi Albert au travers de ses lettres inédites, 1882-1916*, Brussels, 1982, 104.

The Elimination of Count Charles de Lalaing

Broqueville's scenario had no such exit in store for the head of the Belgian legation in London. Davignon firmly opposed the replacement of Count Charles de Lalaing, arguing that Lalaing had always rendered valuable services to the Belgian state, largely because he was very highly esteemed in English Society, and because he held the friendship of the British Foreign Minister and the particular benevolence of the British King. Such elements were of great importance, Davignon explained, for in London salons still constituted the prime venue for the settlement of diplomatic matters.⁸⁵¹ As such, Broqueville's argument that sending Paul Hymans to London was most beneficial to Belgium, did not convince Davignon, who beseeched Broqueville not "to humiliate the Belgian diplomatic corps by the choice of a parliamentarian." In the current circumstances, the Foreign Minister considered it unwise "to shake the confidence of our devoted agents of the foreign service, who [...] easily hold their own with those of any other nation." Davignon also repeatedly warned Broqueville that "a diplomatic agent [...] cannot be improvised" and that his experience in Brussels had revealed that in diplomacy, "politicians have always failed."⁸⁵²

Davignon's final assumption ran counter to the prevailing ideas in the Belgian community in northern France. Broqueville was among those who believed that politicians were excellently suited to meet the demands of wartime diplomacy. Apparently Hymans felt the same, for he accepted Broqueville's offer. In his memoirs, Hymans claims not to have known from the onset of his mission to what he owed the honour. Only later had he heard that Lord Northcliffe, the owner of the influential newspaper *The Times*, had insisted that Belgium would send "a political personality who could strengthen our [the Belgian government's] action during discussions about the problems of war." The Liberal parliamentarian also remarked that his predecessor in London was more accustomed to "the serene tasks of a peaceful neutrality than to the torments of an international crisis."⁸⁵³

Surely, it remains difficult to judge to what extent a foreign press baron could influence decisions about which Belgian diplomat to send where. Yet Lord Northcliffe's reputation as an adversary of traditional diplomacy and as the leading British propagandist certainly increased the authority of his recommendation, especially considering that his words

⁸⁵¹ AMBZ, 12.978, "Réorganisation des services extérieurs", Représentation diplomatique en 1915, à Paris, à Londres, à Rome, et à La Haye (Confidentiel), Julien Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, 7 January 1915. From a historiographical point of view, it is interesting how the Catholic historian Henri Haag reframes Davignon's argumentation and adds some elements to it in order to prove that Lalaing would have done a far better job than his Liberal successor Paul Hymans. See HAAG, *Le Comte Charles de Broqueville*, 361-362.

⁸⁵² AMBZ, 12.978, "Réorganisation des services extérieurs", Représentation diplomatique en 1915, à Paris, à Londres, à Rome, et à La Haye (Confidentiel), Julien Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, 7 January 1915.

⁸⁵³ HYMANS, *Mémoires*, 134-135.

appealed to some Belgian politicians' views of themselves and of Belgian diplomats.⁸⁵⁴ In the former's perception, conducting effective propaganda campaigns proved beyond the latter's competences.

The First World War had significantly changed attitudes towards mass communication. Among policy makers, the idea had long taken root that the massive growth of literacy and the concomitant rise of the popular press in the late nineteenth century allowed for opinions of the people to be moulded and channelled to suit political goals. By the time the war broke out, this line of thought had pervaded the international scene.⁸⁵⁵ Aware that in both neutral and allied countries large numbers of men and women were thirsting for information about the war and the parties involved, leaders of belligerent countries wished to mobilize these international public opinions and to rally them to their cause.⁸⁵⁶ The Belgian government did not command any organisation specifically suited for such activities. It thus had to rely primarily on the country's diplomats. Presumably because the latter's actions were judged inadequate, the government sent special missions composed of politicians and other prominent personalities to neutral countries in Europe and North America. This decision led Mélot, Lorand, and Destrée to Italy, and had previously led another temporary mission with the same ideological composition (the Christian Democrat Henry Carton de Wiart, the Liberal Hymans, and the Socialist Emile Vandervelde) to the United States. In Switzerland, a trio of university professors carried out similar propaganda activities.⁸⁵⁷ These were the kind of

⁸⁵⁴ MESSINGER, Gary S., *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War*, Manchester, 144-161.

⁸⁵⁵ See for instance BÖSCH, Frank, "Journalists, Politicians and Scandals in Imperial Germany and Britain", in Frank BÖSCH and Dominik GEPPERT (eds.), *Journalists as Political Actors: Transfers and Interactions between Britain and Germany since the late 19th Century*, Augsburg, 2008, 16-34; GEPPERT, Dominik, *Pressekrige: Öffentlichkeit und Diplomatie in den deutsch-britischen Beziehungen (1896-1912)*, Munich, 2007; and various essays in FISHER, John and Antony BEST (eds.), *On the Fringes of Diplomacy. Influences on British Foreign Policy, 1800-1945*, Farnham, 2011.

⁸⁵⁶ MARQUIS, Alice Goldfarb, "Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany during the First World War", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13/3, 1978, 467-498. See also HASTE, Cate, *Keep the home fires burning: Propaganda in the First World War*, London, 1977; SANDERS, M.L. and Philip M. TAYLOR, *British propaganda during the First World War*, London, 1982; KENNEDY, David M., *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, Oxford, 2004 [1980], 45-92; BUITENHUIS, Peter, *The Great War of Words: British, American and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933*, Vancouver, 1987; AUBERT, Paul, "La propagande étrangère en Espagne pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale", *Españoles y franceses en la primera mitad del siglo XX*, Madrid, 1986, 357-411; MONTANT, Jean-Claude, *La propagande extérieure de la France pendant la Première Guerre mondiale: l'exemple de quelques neutres européens*, unpublished PhD thesis, Université Paris 1-Panthéon Sorbonne, 1989.

⁸⁵⁷ Literature on Belgian propaganda during the First World War remains scarce. In the 1970s, Michel Dumoulin undertook a few exploratory studies, while Michael Amara's MThesis and subsequent article followed more than twenty years later. See DUMOULIN, Michel, "La propagande Belge en Italie au début de la première guerre mondiale (août-décembre 1914)", *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome*, 46-47, 1976-1977, 335-336; and Id., "La propagande belge dans les pays neutres au début de la première guerre mondiale (août 1914 – février 1915)", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Militaire Geschiedenis*, September 1977, 252. See also AMARA, Michael, *La propagande belge durant la Première Guerre mondiale*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Université

diplomats that Alphonse Nothomb had in mind during his 1895 foreign budget intervention in the Chamber. During their journeys across Europe and the Atlantic, they witnessed Belgian diplomats at work and were not always satisfied with what they saw. They might have also seen themselves as diplomats, but doing a much better job.

It is probably not a coincidence that these missions were predominantly composed of progressive politicians. In the early stages of the First World War, their more conservative colleagues not only kept holding on to Belgian neutrality and therefore opposed propaganda activities that might be considered as a violation of this principle, they might also have wished to reserve the field of diplomacy as much as possible to career diplomats. Although the existing literature ascribes the initiative of sending politicians and experts abroad to ‘the government’, archival research allows to specify that it actually originated in the mind of Broqueville, or at least that the Cabinet Chief certainly wanted it to be remembered as such.⁸⁵⁸ Yet Broqueville did not act alone, but consulted with the Justice Minister Henry Carton de Wiart. The private papers of this Christian Democrat hold a document drafted by Broqueville probably around the end of August 1914 and containing proposals for which politicians to send to which neutral countries. These suggestions did not fully correspond with the eventual missions, which might indicate that also Carton had a say in the matter.⁸⁵⁹ Carton’s papers also contain a letter from Broqueville in which he reflected, four years later, upon the propaganda initiatives he had taken. “Sorting out papers the other day,” Broqueville wrote to Carton, “I encountered the objections made to me when I suggested to the King and to the Council [of Ministers] the idea of your mission to America.” The opposition that had arisen then, and towards later similar initiatives, elicited from him the remark that “it is bizarre how certain minds loath new things.”⁸⁶⁰

For politicians like Broqueville, Carton de Wiart and Hymans, their more conservative colleagues were less an obstacle than several of Belgium’s senior diplomats whom they believed were so imbued with the principle of neutrality that they refrained from cultivating the public opinion of their host countries. According to Broqueville, Count de Lalaing ranked among them. It is unclear how Davignon eventually agreed to the replacement of Belgium’s head of legation in London, but since he had admitted to Broqueville that Lalaing had

Libre de Bruxelles, 1998; and Id., “La propagande belge et l’image de la Belgique aux Etats-Unis pendant la Première Guerre mondiale”, *BTNG*, 30/1-2, 2000, 173-226.

⁸⁵⁸ See DUMOULIN, “La propagande belge dans les pays neutres”, 247; AMARA, “La propagande belge”, 179.

⁸⁵⁹ ARA, I 223, “Papiers de Henry Carton de Wiart”, n° 659, Note to the Justice Minister [Carton de Wiart], [August 1914].

⁸⁶⁰ ARA, I 223, “Papiers de Henry Carton de Wiart”, n° 1089, Charles de Broqueville to Henry Carton de Wiart, 27 August 1918.

“perhaps a little ignored” new tasks created by the war, he did reveal a certain susceptibility to the prime minister’s arguments that the latter could have easily capitalized upon.⁸⁶¹

In any case, ten days after Van der Elst had informed Baron d’Erp about the government’s decision regarding the end of his career, Davignon himself conveyed the same message to Lalaing. The count’s reaction differed from that of his colleague in the Vatican. Apparently, Davignon had pointed out to Lalaing that “the leaders of the Belgian political parties have succeeded, before the enemy, to forget their quarrels, in order to lend their assistance to the government.” To Lalaing, “this patriotic zest” was “only natural”, and occurring in most other countries involved in the war as well. Less natural to Lalaing was that “for want of portfolios, these persons would accept legations.” Yet what Lalaing claimed to have the most difficulties with was that, because one leader of the opposition happened to have “a preference for London”, the government simply took away the posting from “the functionary who has held it for more than eleven years.” The diplomat did feel the need to express to Davignon his presumption “that before writing to me, you have obtained the approval of the King, although His Majesty has so far not been graciously pleased to let me know anything.” If such was the case, Lalaing continued, “all I can do is to obey the orders of the King, whose loyal servant I remain.” He concluded his letter accepting the formula for retirement that Davignon proposed, although not without adding a few bitter comments.⁸⁶²

Lalaing considered his removal from London as a consequence of the intrusion by politicians upon what was his by right. He also found it very difficult to understand why his master the King did not stop these intruders, all the more since King George V of England had manifested his surprise about the Belgian government’s decision during Lalaing’s farewell audience. As the diplomat’s wife wrote to a friend, the British King had even directly asked him: “Why have you not been able to obtain the intervention of Albert on your behalf?” Lalaing’s wife also explained that “if the K[ing] would have written, appealing to his devotion, my husband would have easier acquiesced in the matter.” Revealing once more that Lalaing’s loyalties lay with the King rather than with the government, his wife added that “the letter of de B[roqueville], although composed with much circumspection, did not suffice.”⁸⁶³

Although the King’s intervention remained forthcoming, which might have made Lalaing feel somewhat disappointed in his sovereign, he continued to attribute his removal to

⁸⁶¹ AMBZ, 12.978, “Réorganisation des services extérieurs”, Représentation diplomatique en 1915, à Paris, à Londres, à Rome, et à La Haye (Confidentiel), Julien Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, 7 January 1915.

⁸⁶² AKP, AE, n° 225, Charles de Lalaing to Julien Davignon, 1 February 1915.

⁸⁶³ Christine du Tour van Bellinchove quoted in ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon Van der Elst, 21 March 1915.

strategies of politicians. Upon reading the name of his successor in the newspaper, Lalaing confided to a colleague, the words “verbum satis sapientibus” came to his mind. Lalaing indeed knew enough, and realized that “the current circumstances tend to greatly favour ambitions.” Ambition was one of the main characteristics that Belgian diplomats had long ascribed to the country’s politicians in the age of party-based politics. Suggesting that the First World War had created the setting for these ambitions to materialize, Lalaing predicted that he would not be the last victim of this course of action, concluding his letter with “vae possidentibus”, a warning for his colleagues who were still in charge of their legations.⁸⁶⁴

How did these men perceive what was happening to D’Erp and Lalaing, who until the end of January 1915 ranked one and two on the diplomatic seniority list? Which causes did they identify for the replacement of these diplomats, and how did they believe that this affected themselves?

Diplomatic Reactions

It seems that most other senior members of the Belgian diplomatic corps sympathized with Lalaing, but less with D’Erp. While visiting Le Havre in mid-January 1915, Count Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, minister plenipotentiary in Luxemburg, had heard about the changes that would take place in Belgium’s top legations. As he wrote to Van der Elst, he found it particularly misbegotten that “one has not waited for a pretext that would humour Lalaing’s susceptibilities and would allow him to honourably accept” the end of his career. Especially considering the fact that Lalaing was one of the most qualified diplomatic agents, Van den Steen continued, “it is pretty cruel ... to reserve him such a career ending.” He concluded his letter wondering “if the ‘silk ribbon’ has already been sent.”⁸⁶⁵ Van den Steen’s sarcastic remark, referring to the promotion in the Order of the Crown that Lalaing was bound to receive, indicates how well he understood that decorations could not make up for the profound humiliation inflicted upon his colleague.⁸⁶⁶ At best, they could serve as an opiate to the diplomat’s grief. A few months later, Van den Steen could inform Van der Elst that the decorations conferred upon Lalaing had indeed been “a balm.” Yet, he tellingly added, this

⁸⁶⁴ Charles de Lalaing quoted in ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon Van der Elst, 18 February 1915.

⁸⁶⁵ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 25 January 1915.

⁸⁶⁶ Lalaing received a Grand Cordon in the Order of the Crown in early March 1915. See ANONYMOUS, “Echos. Nos diplomates”, *Le XXe siècle*, 11 March 1915.

applied “especially to the one given by K[ing] G[eorge].”⁸⁶⁷ For Lalaing, the British decoration seems to have constituted a recognition that he had done his job well. Moreover, it came from a monarch who had always treated his honour with great respect.

Count Werner van den Steen de Jehay, head of mission of the Belgian legation to the Italian monarchy, shared his younger brother’s sentiments as to Lalaing. Baron d’Erp’s situation, however, elicited less sympathy. According to the older Van den Steen, D’Erp had largely brought his dismissal on himself. “Many times I have deplored his attitude and risked, subtly, a friendly advice,” he wrote, regretting that “it had no use.”⁸⁶⁸ Frédéric van den Steen passed a harsher judgment. He claimed that he could have predicted that D’Erp, upon receiving Van der Elst’s letter, “would have dashed to the Vatican” to inform the Pope. This demarche, the younger Van den Steen believed, was nothing less than “a serious attempt to hold on to his function.” As such, Baron d’Erp had “exceeded the bonds of dignity.”⁸⁶⁹ Diplomatic honour, so it seemed, required what D’Erp had failed to provide, namely greatness in defeat under all circumstances. This included a certain self-abnegation in the service of the state that, diplomats might have believed, distinguished them from many ambitious and opportunist politicians.

This did not alter the fact that the political intrusion on the diplomats’ prerogatives made the younger Van den Steen feel “rather discouraged, not to say disgusted or outraged.” He found it “so sad to see the honest ones sacrificed, supplanted without serious reasons, to see the rewards go to the least deserving, to see the intriguants, the ‘sharks’ as you [Van der Elst] call them, exploiting the disarray in order to make believe as if they were indispensable.”⁸⁷⁰ His brother Werner fully agreed, but used a different metaphor. He vented his impression that “since a certain time, our Government is acting like a ship somewhat adrift, submerging in the general disarray by influences whose value it fails to assess.”⁸⁷¹

Although both comparisons referred to maritime imagery, the older Van den Steen’s allegory is not fully compatible with the one Van der Elst used. Two of the sharks that worried the Secretary General could be identified as Hymans, the opposition leader who made

⁸⁶⁷ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 21 March 1915.

⁸⁶⁸ Werner van den Steen de Jehay quoted in ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 24 February 1915.

⁸⁶⁹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 18 February 1915.

⁸⁷⁰ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 25 January 1915.

⁸⁷¹ Werner van den Steen de Jehay quoted in ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 24 February 1915.

representing Belgium at the most coveted resort on Diplomatic Island into his target, and Broqueville, the leader of the government who wished to gain control over the Belgian resort. Werner van den Steen, by contrast, seemed to picture the government as a vessel that, even though it had for a long time possessed little access to the harbour of the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island, counted among its traditional duties the protection of the resort. This included safeguarding the shores from sharks. Some perspective is added by the fact that the older Van den Steen mentioned that the ship had been adrift “since a certain time” and moreover explained that “this is the sad consequence of the errors of our domestic politics during half a century.” 1915 minus half a century is 1865. This is not only the year that Leopold I, the only Belgian King that was truly active on the European diplomatic scene, had died. Taken more generally, the mid-1860s are also the times when the remains of Belgian unionism, personified in the prime minister and former revolutionary leader Charles Rogier, who still believed in the primacy of foreign policy, were wiped out by the intense partisan Walthère Frère-Orban, who took over the leadership of the government and subordinated Belgian diplomacy to internal politics. By then, it was clear that the rise of the Belgian party-political system, so loathed by many diplomats, had gained momentum and, as Werner van den Steen regretted, could no longer be stopped.⁸⁷² It led to the extensions of the franchise in the early 1890s, and about fifteen years later, to the entrance of the first Christian Democrats in the government.⁸⁷³

Seen from the diplomats’ perspective, this development seems to have gradually turned the government’s ship from a vessel which had to guide the state through troubled waters into a pirate boat. From representatives of the state, politicians had indeed become more and more representatives of their parties and as such they destabilized the state. Some members of the government seemed to have turned into pirates and had taken over the ship. In 1915, a few of them, among which Captain de Broqueville, debarked on Diplomatic Island.

Diplomats tended not, however, to rank Jules Van den Heuvel among these pirates. The attitude of Baron d’Erp towards his successor had already indicated this. Van den Heuvel had never been an elected parliamentarian but had only served in the government as Justice Minister because of his expertise as a law professor. The same expertise, and his experience as advisor of Davignon, made him perfectly suited to defend Belgium’s interests in the Vatican.⁸⁷⁴ Both Frédéric Van den Steen and Léon Van der Elst held Van den Heuvel in high

⁸⁷² HELMREICH, *Belgium*, 102-103.

⁸⁷³ DUMOULIN, “Het ontluiken van de twintigste eeuw”, 756-757.

⁸⁷⁴ See THIELEMANS, “Albert de l’enfance à la maturité”, 104.

regard. “It will be interesting to follow the evolutions of the one that you call ‘Jules’ in a theatre where all his qualities will serve so admirably well,” the younger Van den Steen wrote to the Secretary General, who like the older Van den Steen was on friendly terms with Belgium’s new minister plenipotentiary in the Vatican.⁸⁷⁵ Much had to do with Van den Heuvel’s respect for the honour of the diplomatic career and its members. Upon hearing about Broqueville’s decision to send him to Rome, Van den Heuvel had immediately consulted with Van der Elst, expressing to the Secretary General his fundamental disapproval with the practice of randomly replacing diplomats. “That the government beware of discouraging the administrative executives”, Van den Heuvel had proclaimed.⁸⁷⁶

At least initially, the younger Van den Steen revealed more susceptibility about the chances of success of Paul Hymans, and did not seem to like him all that much. “Even though many men currently in power on that island [Great Britain] are themselves very politician [in French ‘très-politicien’, ‘politicien’ also meaning ‘cunning’ or ‘devious’],” Van den Steen argued, the British Foreign Minister “likely prefers encountering career diplomats than politicians.” Yet having seen Hymans on the job, Van den Steen revised his opinions. Hymans, he found, was generally considered “a very meritorious man”, “spent enormously”, and had “a great desire to do well”. In these times of war, diplomats like the younger Van den Steen apparently allowed for strangers to take part in diplomacy, provided that they adapted to the prevailing diplomatic culture. Nevertheless, it took more than that to become a diplomat, Van den Steen must have thought when seeing that Hymans “begins already to take a slight aversion to the little difficulties.”⁸⁷⁷

The older Van den Steen acknowledged that the threat coming from politicians could also have wholesome effects. “I would even say that I would find no fault with replacing some heads of mission,” he claimed, though swiftly specifying “on the condition that the service does not get disorganized and only the insufficient are replaced by capable ones.” The older Van den Steen went as far as to state that, if he was judged to be no longer up to his task, he would give way to a younger or better diplomat. It was the least non-fighters like himself could do, he added, while so many were spilling their blood for the country. Yet also

⁸⁷⁵ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 18 February 1915. See also, in the same archive, n° 122, Jules Van den Heuvel to Léon van der Elst, 1 April 1915: “it is superfluous to inform you that I have received the most sensible advice from our friend [Werner] Van den Steen.” See also AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51, Werner van den Steen de Jehay to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 23 September 1915: “mon collègue et ami Van den Heuvel”.

⁸⁷⁶ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 122, Jules Van den Heuvel to Léon van der Elst, 1 September 1916.

⁸⁷⁷ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 18 February and 21 March 1915.

this time, he qualified his statement, declaring “without reserve” that he would “never agree to go in order to make place for an intrigant.” The older Van den Steen concluded the letter to his brother with a piece of advice, in which he reflected upon the replacements that had occurred a few weeks earlier: “Whatever the future that is reserved for us, let us face it with calm and dignity. Let us accept just measures, without resenting them, but let us be firm towards intrigants, whoever they are.” Despite the determined tone of this proclamation, he could not hide his anxiety and therefore asked his brother: “Am I also under threat?”⁸⁷⁸

Fortunately for the older Van den Steen, during the First World War he would never find himself in a situation in which he had to calmly and dignifiedly accept just measures, or stand firmly towards intrigants. If Michel Dumoulin is to be believed, the diplomat seems to have done all he could to avoid that. Dumoulin even describes the older Van den Steen as the earliest and most intelligent propagandist of all Belgian diplomats. Dumoulin supports this claim by arguing that as early as eight days after the violation of Belgian neutrality, Van den Steen had already given an interview to an Italian newspaper in which he condemned the German army’s invasion of his country. The diplomat would use this method several times more in the following months.⁸⁷⁹ Surely, it is not clear whether Broqueville and other members of the government really considered that to be sufficient. In any case, Van den Steen kept his guard up. He had indeed heard rumours that particularly the socialist Jules Destrée, who roamed the Italian peninsula in the early years of the war, was out for a diplomatic posting.⁸⁸⁰ Van den Steen responded by treating Destrée with great courtesy, and acting as the perfect host for him and the other politicians sent to gain the support of the Italian public opinion for the Belgian cause. Destrée seems to have been impressed by so much benevolence, for virtually every time he mentioned the older Van den Steen in his diaries, he accompanied the diplomat’s name with appreciative comments, such as “most charming”, “amiability personified”, and “always exquisitely courteous”.⁸⁸¹ In addition to acting as the perfect host, Van den Steen also praised the propaganda activities of Destrée and Lorand in letters to the Foreign Minister and to Paul Hymans. Ever an aristocrat, he thereby manifested a slight preference for the style of Destrée, who “exposed the true nature of German piracy” to

⁸⁷⁸ Werner van den Steen de Jehay quoted in ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 24 February 1915.

⁸⁷⁹ DUMOULIN, “La propagande belge”, 249.

⁸⁸⁰ These rumours were repeated later by Jules van den Heuvel, and by Baron Beyens. See ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 122, Jules Van den Heuvel to Léon van der Elst, 1 September 1916; and AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 65, Journal de mon ambassade à Rome, v. 1, p. 22-23.

⁸⁸¹ DUMOULIN, Michel (ed.), *Jules Destrée. Souvenirs des temps de guerre*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980, 160, 174, and 208.

“the thinking classes”, over the way Lorand did the same, but in discourses “more particularly directed towards the populace”.⁸⁸²

In a letter to Baron Beyens, who by then had become Foreign Minister, Van den Steen not only expressed his full support for the activities of these politicians, but also his regret that his diplomatic functions restrained him from taking a more active part in propaganda activities. He indeed knew that Beyens, although a staunch supporter of Belgian neutrality for the duration of the war, did not consider propaganda activities as going against this principle. Beyens had actually undertaken efforts to influence international public opinion by means of publishing indictments against the German government in a French review.⁸⁸³ In June 1915, Beyens collected these articles in his book *L'Allemagne avant la guerre*, which gained a lot of positive response in both Allied and neutral countries and was translated in English only months after its appearance in French.⁸⁸⁴

“I deem it superfluous to inform you about what I have undertaken, personally, to preserve the sympathies of the Italian nation,” Van den Steen wrote to Beyens, explaining that “it is not much because a diplomatic representative has to avoid to push himself to the fore if he wants to maintain his credit.” Politicians, on the contrary, were “less bound by reticence and could produce more results if, belonging to different political parties, they pull in the same direction.”⁸⁸⁵ In addition to a senior diplomat’s belief in the benefits of a unionist stance in foreign policy, the observations of Van den Steen reveal a certain tension between the self-effacement so long required of diplomats, and which applied to diplomats of a neutral country in particular, and the new tasks created by the war. The growth of public opinion caused by processes of democratization in the previous decades indeed posed challenges that, according to many senior diplomats, their diplomatic dignity prevented them from fully embracing.

⁸⁸² The letter is printed in DUMOULIN, *Jules Destrée*, 275-276. See also AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51, Werner van den Steen de Jehay to Paul Hymans, 17 September 1915.

⁸⁸³ See his articles “L’empereur Guillaume”, *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 March 1915, 5-30; “La famille impériale allemande. – La Cour. – Le Gouvernement”, *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 March 1915, 241-271; “L’Armée et la marine allemandes. – Le parti de la Guerre”, *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 April 1915, 481-501; “Le Semaine tragique”, *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 June 1915, 481-506; and “La Neutralité belge et l’invasion de la Belgique”, *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 June 1915, 721-746.

⁸⁸⁴ See BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, *L'Allemagne avant la guerre*, Brussels and Paris, 1915. For the English translation, see BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, *Germany before the War*, London, Edinburgh and New York, 1916. For positive comments from Dutch, English and Chinese press, see ANONYMOUS, “Oorlogsliteratuur. Baron Beyens,” *De Nieuwe Courant*, 22 January 1916 (to be found in AMBZ, PF 31, “Eugène-Napoléon Beyens”); AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Paul Hymans to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 21 December 1915; and n° 51, Emile de Cartier de Marchienne to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 21 March 1916; and ANONYMOUS, “Bibliographie. Un livre du Baron Beyens. C’est Kaiser qui est responsable”, *Le Journal de Pékin*, 11 March 1916 (to be found in AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51).

⁸⁸⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51, Werner van den Steen de Jehay to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 23 September 1915.

Since such restraints were not imposed on politicians, the older Van den Steen seemed to argue, it was an unfair battle. Diplomats had to operate with much more circumspection.

Commenting in a letter to Van der Elst about his older brother's fear for replacement, Frédéric van den Steen claimed to know that this fear was not unique: other diplomats had felt the same. Nevertheless, the younger Van den Steen, too, perceived some positive effects in the measure, finding that "there are feeble and idle characters for whom anxieties like these could have the effect of a salutary spur." Yet, like his brother, he also condemned the lack of distinction the government had made between capable and incapable agents. The younger Van den Steen claimed to know that "the arbitrary side of the measure leads to discouragement, taking away security and confidence." Even in times of war, Van den Steen seemed to find, diplomats who had invested so much of themselves in their functions, had a right to an honourable career ending. To Van den Steen, the war had temporarily produced an unnatural situation in the authority structure of Belgian foreign policy: "Those who abuse a power that is momentarily too absolute appear to me as squanderers of 'good will' They disburse a painstakingly acquired treasure of erudition, tact and tradition. They are dissipating sons throwing away their father's fortune."⁸⁸⁶

It seems that the younger Van den Steen had difficulties coping with the consequences of democratization that the war, in his eyes, had turned into excesses. He apparently accepted that the government had acquired part of the authority over foreign policy over the past decades. As we have seen, this development was caused by the withdrawal of Leopold II from the European scene, and in the years before his death, from imperial politics as well. Prior to the war, the reins of Belgian diplomacy had not been taken up by King Albert in the way his predecessors had done. This gave politicians such as Broqueville and Hymans, again in the eyes of Van den Steen, the opportunity to waste a treasure of diplomatic skills, personified by the members of the diplomatic corps. According to Van den Steen, this treasure was gathered by the fathers of the country, namely the Belgian Kings. It was indeed with King and Country, he seemed to say, that the allegiances of Belgian diplomats lay.

The younger Van den Steen concluded his letter to Van der Elst denouncing the lack of patriotism that Broqueville and other members of the government had manifested, asking whether "the fever of destruction really has to be so contagious that, finding our unfortunate country not sufficiently suffering, we start to destroy ourselves the little that is left of its

⁸⁸⁶ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 24 February 1915.

ancient structure.”⁸⁸⁷ It might be something of a stretch to deduce from these comments that Van den Steen considered the war as a consequence of popular sentiments gotten out of hand, like many other European diplomats did. It might be even more of a stretch to follow this line a little further and argue that he considered European politicians, especially the ones that democratization had lifted to power, as partly responsible for the conflict. But what he certainly did not hold accountable, was the ancient structure of both European society and diplomacy. On a national level, Frédéric Van den Steen seemed to want the government to lower the pirate flag and firmly retake the wheel of the ship that had to protect the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island. Members of the government had to leave it to the islanders to defend, under the guidance of their Ruler, the interests of the Mainland. They should definitely not tamper with the old structure of the House standing on the Belgian resort.

§ 2. Diplomatic Hospitality

The removal of Count Charles de Lalaing had clearly elicited passionate comments from senior diplomats. Still, these sentiments do not fully explain why Albert did not write a letter of consolation to the man who had entered the diplomatic career in 1880, and served King and country for almost thirty-five years before being pensioned off at the age of fifty-seven. According to Marie-Rose Thielemans, who unfortunately enough does not indicate any sources to support her statement, Albert was very displeased with the welcome that his representative in London had given to the Belgian refugees in England. Apparently, Lalaing had too clearly manifested his irritation in front of these people, whom he considered to be encumbering his salons and staining his carpets.⁸⁸⁸ In addition to propaganda activities, the First World War had indeed also added hospitality towards larger sections of the population to the diplomats’ range of duties.

Most likely, however, the reproaches made against Lalaing could also be addressed to the diplomats who were ultimately allowed to stay in their postings. While singing the praises of Baron Albéric Fallon’s qualities as a diplomat, Davignon acknowledged before Broqueville that Belgium’s head of legation in The Hague had “sometimes” neglected his chancellery work, which included giving aid to Belgian citizens abroad. Yet, the Foreign Minister continued, no one had ever complained. To support his argument, Davignon stated that even

⁸⁸⁷ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 24 February 1915.

⁸⁸⁸ THIELEMANS, “Albert de l’enfance à la maturité”, 104.

Joris Helleputte, the Agriculture Minister and Broqueville's political friend in the Belgian government, would confirm this.⁸⁸⁹ The fact that Davignon invoked the authority of Helleputte in this matter actually suggests that someone had complained and that Fallon had not warmly received many Belgian refugees either. Together with the Finance Minister Aloys Van de Vyvere, Helleputte stood closer to the Flemish movement than the other members of the government. Large parts of this movement had regrouped in The Netherlands after the outbreak of war. Their leaders had repeatedly requested the removal of Fallon, whose deeply anti-Flemish attitude offended them.⁸⁹⁰ Baron Fallon, however, held the friendship of Paul Hymans, which might have convinced Broqueville not to push through his plans for the diplomat's replacement.⁸⁹¹ Doing so might have indeed complicated his relationship with the Liberal leader. Moreover, whereas Davignon opposed but not categorically refused to replace Lalaing with Hymans, he did in the case of the appointment of Fallon's successor. Davignon proclaimed that he "would not accept the responsibility" of proposing to the King to have overtaken at least two highly experienced advisors by the less senior Prince de Ligne.⁸⁹² Since Fallon was the least important of the three senior diplomats that Broqueville wanted to have replaced, he might have found it easier to abandon the idea.

Davignon also portrayed the last of the diplomats under discussion, that is Baron Guillaume, as an excellent agent, and stressed how difficult it would be to replace him. Nevertheless, the Foreign Minister had to admit that Belgium's head of legation in Paris had "a few personal failings". Among these the diplomat's "lack of hospitality" ranked prominently.⁸⁹³ In his 1927 memoirs, the journalist Gérard Harry confirmed this aspect of Baron Guillaume's personality and argued that the diplomat shared this characteristic with many of his colleagues. He described how in the first weeks of the war more than a thousand exiled Belgians heavily solicited the Paris legation to organize their admission to the Belgian army. "For an answer, they received something worse than a *non possumus*," Harry asserted, claiming that Guillaume invoked the congestion of the French railroads as the reason that the wish of the "patriotic applicants" could not materialize. According to Harry, Guillaume even

⁸⁸⁹ AMBZ, 12.978, "Réorganisation des services extérieurs", Représentation diplomatique en 1915, à Paris, à Londres, à Rome, et à La Haye (Confidentiel), Julien Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, 7 January 1915.

⁸⁹⁰ Some elements of the antagonistic relationship between Fallon in the Flemish leaders in the Netherlands are to be found in WILS, Lode, *Flamenpolitik en Activisme. Vlaanderen tegenover België in de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, Leuven, 1974, 179, 199, 209, 231.

⁸⁹¹ SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 31.

⁸⁹² AMBZ, 12.978, "Réorganisation des services extérieurs", Représentation diplomatique en 1915, à Paris, à Londres, à Rome, et à La Haye (Confidentiel), Julien Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, 7 January 1915.

⁸⁹³ AMBZ, 12.978, "Réorganisation des services extérieurs", Représentation diplomatique en 1915, à Paris, à Londres, à Rome, et à La Haye (Confidentiel), Julien Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, 7 January 1915.

advised them to join the French *Légion étrangère*, which they did, only belatedly realizing how “infinitely painful the service under a somewhat cosmopolitan flag was.” Surely, this was the nationalist Harry writing after the events and making a case, like several of his kindred spirits, of the incompatibility between patriotism and cosmopolitanism. Diplomats, he implicitly suggested, experienced no problems at all with such cosmopolitanism. A greater problem for aspiring Belgian soldiers in foreign lands, Harry stated, was “the laxity, the incompetence, and sometimes the blindness of most representatives of Belgium abroad.”⁸⁹⁴

Adopting the diplomats’ perspective, the First World War had indeed created challenges in matters of diplomatic hospitality. Before August 1914, diplomats were only expected to occasionally open their houses to foreign colleagues, leading personalities of their host countries and from time to time also to prominent persons from their home countries. Now, they were faced with all sorts and conditions of people who requested services they were not used to accustomed to render. Apparently, several diplomats were not up these new tasks, nor willing to make a serious effort to fulfil them.

§ 3. Challenging the King

Although Broqueville certainly failed to appreciate Guillaume’s alleged lack of hospitality and complaisance, his problems with the diplomat lay deeper. In mid-September 1914, Guillaume had informed Davignon about a conversation he had with the French President Raymond Poincaré. During this encounter, the diplomat had characterized the fact that Belgium did not possess at least one entire bank of the Scheldt as “an abnormal situation ... that had to be modified, like many others by the way, particularly the enclave of Dutch Limburg.” Guillaume had added that if the neutral Netherlands behaved well enough to earn compensations for these losses, it was up to the Allies to find them.⁸⁹⁵ With this report Guillaume revealed once more that he was one of few Belgian senior diplomats who had never really been affected by the conceptions of Belgian neutrality that men like Arendt and Greindl had infused the diplomatic corps with. Although Broqueville did not support this conservative view on neutrality either, or at least not any more, he could not condone what Guillaume had done. He therefore informed the Foreign Ministry that the diplomat’s attitude necessitated “prompt and very severe observations”. Broqueville claimed that he could not

⁸⁹⁴ HARRY, Gérard, *Mes mémoires*, Brussels, 1927-1930, vol. I, 77-79.

⁸⁹⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 60, Paul Guillaume to Julien Davignon, 15 September 1914.

accept that a Belgian diplomat would so inconsiderately jeopardize the government's relations with the Netherlands. He was so upset with this "act of extreme levity" that he wished "that the terms of the blame to be cast upon Baron Guillaume" were communicated to him before they were sent.⁸⁹⁶

Yet Guillaume survived this token of distrust from Broqueville, and he could even hold on to his posting after the Cabinet Chief's New Year's letter to Davignon. Why? Lack of sources make answering this question particularly difficult. Nevertheless, some explanation can be found by looking at what was happening above the heads of Belgian diplomats. The outbreak of war had indeed coincided with the beginnings of a struggle for the reins of Belgian foreign policy between the King and the government, or more specifically between the King and Broqueville.

Albert believed that Belgium had to maintain its neutrality during the war, and only fought for the restoration of the country's independence and territorial integrity. Belgium thus had different war aims than the Allied Powers. According to the King, defeating the German army was not a condition for peace. This is why he opposed Belgium's adherence to the Pact of London, an agreement concluded in early September 1914 by Great-Britain, France and Russia, and stipulating that the Allied Powers would not negotiate a separate peace with the Central Powers. As long as the outcome of the war could not be predicted, Albert judged it best not to be associated too closely with France and Great-Britain.⁸⁹⁷ Many members of the government, including key figures such as the Colonial Minister Jules Renkin and the Justice Minister Henry Carton de Wiart, held opposite ideas. They did favour a closer association with the Allied Powers, and particularly with France, whose government had showed them and many Belgian citizens a hospitality that they seem to have found obliging. They also did oppose the system of neutrality, which contrary to the situation during the previous Franco-German war, had not safeguarded the country. More importantly, it would not take long before these politicians came to nourish territorial claims towards Germany, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg.⁸⁹⁸

Six weeks after he had disciplined Guillaume for endangering Belgium's relations with the Netherlands, Broqueville revealed that he favoured annexation of foreign lands as well. In an interview in the widely read French newspaper *Le Petit Parisien*, the Cabinet Chief assumed a highly militant and Francophile stance. He not only declared his solidarity

⁸⁹⁶ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 60, 'Note for Foreign Affairs' drafted by Charles de Broqueville, 18 September 1914.

⁸⁹⁷ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 250-252.

⁸⁹⁸ PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 231-233.

with the Allied Powers, but also argued that only the reestablishment of Germany's pre-1870 borders could prevent future wars. This meant turning Germany back into Prussia. As if this verbal disavowal of Belgian neutrality did not offend the King enough, Broqueville portrayed his sovereign, albeit very subtly, as a timid and incompetent military leader.⁸⁹⁹

The extent to which Broqueville favoured the abandonment of neutrality and the incorporation of Dutch, German and Luxemburg territories, has led to some historiographical controversy. Independently from each other, both Marie-Rose Thielemans and Maria De Waele have portrayed Broqueville as very annexionist.⁹⁰⁰ Henri Haag, however, has vehemently opposed these charges in his glorifying biography of the statesman. However, the American historian Michael Palo has proven that Haag, in constructing the most favourable image of his hero, has deliberately neglected to use source material which would lead to contrary conclusions. This especially held for his views on Belgian war aims.⁹⁰¹

Making abstraction of Haag's eulogie of Broqueville, a wider consensus exists as to the Cabinet Chief's great ambition to put his signature on the future peace treaty.⁹⁰² For this to materialize, he needed to gain control over the execution of Belgian foreign policy in order to take over the Foreign Ministry when the time would be ripe. Perhaps he merely used the language of annexationism to acquire the necessary support for his candidature in Belgian political and press circles in Le Havre. The annexionist stance indeed allowed Broqueville to accommodate the desires of Belgian nationalists within the government and thus to strengthen his position as Head of the Cabinet. In the first months of 1915, *Le XXe siècle*, the journal led by Broqueville's friend Fernand Neuray and published in Le Havre from mid-November 1914 as a truly "national" newspaper that would undertake "merciless battle against every threat to the country's unity", started a campaign that connected annexionism with nationalism and denounced all Belgians that opposed territorial expansion as anti-patriotic.⁹⁰³ As we will see in the next chapter, Neuray received active support from, as a *primus inter pares* among others, the lawyer and publicist Pierre Nothomb. Neuray and Nothomb constituted the very active nucleus of annexationist publicists who strained themselves to influence the direction

⁸⁹⁹ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 254; THIELEMANS, "Albert de l'enfance", 103.

⁹⁰⁰ THIELEMANS, "Albert de l'enfance", 105-109; DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 297-300.

⁹⁰¹ See especially PALO, Michael, "HAAG (Henri). *Le comte Charles de Broqueville, Ministre d'État, et les luttes pour le pouvoir (1910-1940)*", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*, 3-4, 1996, 1045-1055 at 1049.

⁹⁰² See for instance SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 94; DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 126-127. See also the perhaps a little more biased comments of Henri Davignon and of Baron Beyens' son Antoine: DAVIGNON, Henri, *Souvenirs d'un écrivain belge, 1879-1945*, Paris, 1954, 281-282; BEYENS, *Un diplomate belge*, 189-200.

⁹⁰³ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 392.

of Belgian foreign policy until well after the war. These men saw in Broqueville the leader who would guide them towards a Greater Belgium.⁹⁰⁴

One of the greatest obstacles on that road was the Belgian King. Albert was not happy with what he read in the 1 November 1914 edition of *Le Petit Parisien*. After consulting with Van der Elst about how to react to the Cabinet Chief's allegations, he demanded that Broqueville had a disclaimer of the interview published in the same newspaper. The King's letter was set in such wording that it incited the Cabinet Chief to offer his resignation. However, Broqueville chose not to write the requested denial. Instead, he published an older royal letter in which the King had praised him. Albert responded to this manoeuvre by accepting Broqueville's resignation, yet reserving the right to decide when the Cabinet Chief had to go. In the end, the King seems to have won the first stage of the struggle, for Broqueville had the disclaimer published a few days later and was invited to the King's residence in De Panne not long afterwards.⁹⁰⁵

Since it is unlikely that Broqueville wrote his New Year's letter to Davignon without at least mentioning its purpose beforehand to the King, perhaps it was at this occasion that he first brought up the changes that he wanted to carry through at the top of Belgium's legations in London, the Vatican, Paris, and The Hague. Perhaps these negotiations between Albert and the Cabinet Chief resulted in a compromise. Broqueville might have foremost wished to remove Van den Heuvel from the Belgian political scene, while the King judged Belgium's relations with Great Britain of the utmost importance and wanted that, if a politician needed to be sent there, it be Paul Hymans, whom he had come to value and trust.⁹⁰⁶ At the end of August 1914, during an audience granted to Hymans and his wife, Albert had told the Liberal leader how much he relied on England and had expressed his belief that "our true protection" could only be guaranteed by that country.⁹⁰⁷

If the *Petit Parisien* affair and the King's refusal of Broqueville's offer to resign was stage one in their struggle for the reins of Belgian foreign policy, the Cabinet Chief's New Year's letter to Davignon was stage two. After strengthening his position within the government, Broqueville did the same in the Foreign Ministry and in the broader Belgian political circles in Le Havre. With Van den Heuvel in the Vatican and Hymans in London, Broqueville eliminated two influential personalities who seemed to lean more towards the King's point of view than towards his, and might have contested his authority in foreign

⁹⁰⁴ WILS, *Flamenpolitik*, 149; DUMOULIN, "Het ontluiken van de twintigste eeuw", 847-849.

⁹⁰⁵ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 254-255; THIELEMANS, "Albert de l'enfance", 103 and 540.

⁹⁰⁶ See THIELEMANS, "Albert de l'enfance", 334, 354, 443, 451, 457-458, 464, 504 and 506..

⁹⁰⁷ THIELEMANS, "Albert de l'enfance", 522.

policy matters. Davignon, whose deteriorating health further reduced the little aptitude he had for his functions, was now bound to succumb to the Cabinet Chief's influence.

The fact that Baron Guillaume eventually stayed on as minister plenipotentiary in Paris could also be seen from this perspective. In a conversation held with Count Frédéric van den Steen in early January 1915, the diplomat had complained that he almost simultaneously received different instructions from on the one hand the Foreign Ministry in Le Havre, where the policy was determined by the neutralists Van der Elst and Van den Heuvel, and on the other hand Broqueville in Dunkirk.⁹⁰⁸ An avid supporter of Belgian territorial expansion, Guillaume might have been more inclined to follow the instructions coming from Dunkirk. In the pragmatic turn towards annexationism that Broqueville was making, leaving Guillaume in place thus had its benefits, he might have thought.

Baron Beyens, whom Broqueville had initially wished to see taking Guillaume's place, would most likely not exhibit any tendency towards opposing the King's point of view. His diplomatic career had often led him to the Royal Palace, lastly from late 1909 until early 1912, when he served as Minister of the King's House, a title that only one person had held before him. A different conception of both his own functions and of the political role that accrued to the monarchy had eventually led to his resignation. While Beyens felt he had to act as a mediator between the King and his minister, Albert seemed to consider him rather as an advisor. More importantly, the King did not appreciate that Beyens told him at which domains the monarchy could actively intervene, and at which ones a more restrained royal attitude was commendable. Albert especially disliked the diplomat's advice that he better stay out of the party-political struggle. According to the King, it was his personal duty to take an active part in bridging partisan divisions and his own Minister should not state the contrary. Since Beyens did not quite get along with a few other members of the Royal Household, he certainly did not regret his transfer to the Belgian legation in Germany in early 1912.⁹⁰⁹ Going to Berlin, as Beyens had confided to Van der Elst a few years before, would indeed be "like a dream coming through."⁹¹⁰ This not to say that his departure from Brussels shook his allegiance to the dynasty, for he largely imputed it to machinations of the King's entourage.⁹¹¹

⁹⁰⁸ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 25 January 1915.

⁹⁰⁹ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 86, 136-137, and 1046; THIELEMANS, "Albert de l'enfance", 58-60; DAVIGNON, *Souvenirs*, 213.

⁹¹⁰ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 3 January 1909.

⁹¹¹ See AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 26, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert of Belgium, s.d. [early 1912]. See also, in the same archive, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 17 July 1914. In this letter, Beyens reminisced about his times in the Royal Palace. Especially his relations with Jules

Albert, from his part, must have remembered that one of the domains where the diplomat did reserve a large role for the monarch, was foreign policy. Not long after Beyens arrived in Brussels from Berlin, where he had to leave due to the imminent war, Albert granted him an audience. In a letter to his wife, Beyens related how he had a long and cordial conversation with the King.⁹¹² The royal audience contrasted sharply with the cold welcome Beyens had received at the Foreign Ministry, and which left him feeling “that they do not need me anymore, and they show it to me.”⁹¹³ At the Palace, judging from his comments, Beyens would informally take up his former functions as Minister of the King’s House less than a day after Albert had granted him an audience. Beyens drafted letters for the King and visited foreign diplomats on his behalf. In between these activities, Beyens claimed, Albert had told him that he wanted to confide him with a mission “that would be an indisputable proof of His sentiments in my regard.”⁹¹⁴ As we will see in the next chapter, the King did not mean sending Beyens off to Paris to lead the Belgian legation. In the case of the Paris legation, the status quo was thus an outcome that suited both Broqueville and the King.

While Van den Heuvel and Hymans were packing their bags, Broqueville and other members of the government felt the time had come to start discussing Belgian war aims in the Council of Ministers. Among other things, they agreed upon the abolishment of neutrality, control of the river Scheldt, and if possible, territorial expansion at the expense of the Netherlands and the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg.⁹¹⁵ Alarmed by these discussions, Albert called upon the ministers to travel north and gather on Belgian territory under his presidency. In early April 1915, the King made it clear that Belgium could not conduct a policy of conquest. Since the war was still far from decided, such policy would deprive the country of the benefits of neutrality and would hazard its relations with the neighbouring countries. Sensing that most ministers did not share his opinion, Albert looked for support outside of the government. He found it in Hymans. The Liberal leader, by quoting an English politician who had told him that “many people enjoy planting flags on lands that they have not conquered”, offered the King a witticism that he could use in his discussions with the annexationist

Ingenbleek, the King’s private secretary, and with Count Jean de Mérode, the Grand Marshall of the Court. After portraying the former as “decorated with ambition”, and the latter as “taking pleasure only in inflicting little humiliations to the people around him, in the hope to prove his superiority”, Beyens thanked God that he did not have to deal with them any longer. See also DAVIGNON, *Souvenirs*, 213.

⁹¹² AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 10 August 1914.

⁹¹³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Diary of Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 8 August 1914.

⁹¹⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 11 August 1914.

⁹¹⁵ THIELEMANS, “Albert de l’enfance”, 105.

ministers.⁹¹⁶ The latter, however, had agreed that Belgium should manifest its territorial ambitions, most especially concerning the estuary of the Scheldt. The Netherlands would then be compensated with German territory. During the next months, Albert did all he could to cool the annexationist fervour of Broqueville and his fellow party members Renkin, Carton de Wiart and Paul Segers, a politician from Antwerp who even pleaded for complete Belgian mastery of the Scheldt estuary. The King eventually managed to obtain that the instructions to be sent to Belgian diplomats contained no reference to any territorial ambitions. They also stated that Belgium opted “to preserve a freely chosen neutrality.”⁹¹⁷ Carton de Wiart, who had pleaded for Belgian territorial expansion during a lecture in Lyon in mid-May 1915, received from Albert an angry letter which seems to have impressed the Justice Minister to the extent that he henceforth chose to keep a low profile in annexationist matters.⁹¹⁸

In the Spring of 1915, Albert had received notes containing opinions about Belgium’s future relations with Germany and about the Scheldt question. These were drafted not only by members of the government, most of whom took an annexionist stance, but also by the Ministers of State from the opposition, namely by Hymans and his fellow-party member Count Eugène Goblet d’Alviella, and by the Socialist Emile Vandervelde. The King would not forget to have read that the politicians from the Left shared his opinions in these matters.⁹¹⁹

Albert had also asked the former Minister of the Royal Household to formulate an answer to the same questions. In a letter sent in late April 1915, Baron Beyens wrote exactly what the King wished to read: no annexation of German nor Dutch lands, no alliances with the Great Powers and certainly not with France, and replacement of the system of permanent neutrality with a collective, one-way Allied guaranty to safeguard Belgian independence. Beyens also claimed to favour some kind of *rapprochement* with the Netherlands and suggested a referendum in the Grand Duchy to solve respectively the Scheldt and Luxemburg questions.⁹²⁰ Reading Beyens’s letter convinced Albert that he had found the perfect candidate to lead the Belgian Foreign Ministry.

However, if he wanted his choice to materialize, the King would have to dispel the Catholic government’s opposition. The war had indeed clearly impacted the process of

⁹¹⁶ Paul Hymans quoted in THIELEMANS, “Albert de l’enfance”, 106-107. See also VELAERS, *Albert I*, 258-259.

⁹¹⁷ Julien Davignon quoted in PALO, “The question of neutrality”, 231. See also VELAERS, *Albert I*, 259-260; and THIELEMANS, “Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916”, 565-568.

⁹¹⁸ THIELEMANS, “Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916”, 571-572.

⁹¹⁹ THIELEMANS, “Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916”, 566-568.

⁹²⁰ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert of Belgium, 30 April 1915. See also PALO, “The question of neutrality”, 232; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 261.

discharging and appointing Foreign Ministers. It was no longer a case of government officials looking for a rich and willing politician who would not encounter the veto of the King, as had happened before Davignon succeeded Favereau. Moreover, Baron Beyens in particular was regarded with some suspicion by the members of the government. During his sojourn as Minister of the Royal Household a few years earlier, politicians of the majority had indeed pasted a Liberal stamp on Beyens. As such, they would certainly interpret the royal manoeuvre as another attempt to create a government of national union, after Albert had named Hymans, Goblet and Vandervelde Ministers of State at the outbreak of war.⁹²¹

Keeping this in mind, the King waited until the instructions to the Belgian diplomats were sent before he tried to administer another bitter pill to the Council of Ministers. His receiving of Baron Guillaume's answer to these instructions, in early June 1915, incited the King to take action. Apparently, Guillaume had exhibited some disapproval of these instructions, and particularly of the decision not to mention any acquisition of Dutch territory. Albert immediately wrote a letter to Davignon that not only denounced Guillaume's sentiments as "revealing a mentality against which we have to react", but also contained some implicit criticisms of the Foreign Minister's lack of authority over Belgian diplomats.⁹²² Three days later, Albert reported in his diary that he had a "conflict with M. de Broqueville about the incapacity of M. Davignon to continue leading the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and about the necessity to place, temporarily if required, a good diplomat like Baron Beyens [at the head of the Department]."⁹²³

Another three days later, on 8 June 1915, Albert put his demands on paper and sent them to Broqueville. The King particularly insisted that the new Foreign Minister would have enough authority and responsibility. Beyens thus had to be named Minister of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs ad interim, while Davignon would be sent on leave to recover from his loss of health since the outbreak of war.⁹²⁴ Broqueville did not accept such settlement, and revealed his own ambitions while trying to convince the King of the solution he had in mind. After minimizing Davignon's alleged incapacity to lead the Foreign Ministry and pointing out the humiliation the King would inflict upon a loyal servant of many years by just pushing him aside, the Cabinet Chief claimed that Davignon himself had suggested some time ago to have Beyens beside him to assist him in the way Van den Heuvel had done before,

⁹²¹ See THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916", 569-571.

⁹²² ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 2, Albert of Belgium to Julien Davignon, 2 June 1915. See also THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916", 578-579.

⁹²³ THIELEMANS, "Les *Carnets de Guerre*", 201.

⁹²⁴ THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916", 581-582.

that is as an adviser. Broqueville stressed that “the conciliatory mind and the broad-mindedness of the Foreign Minister” provided sufficient guarantees that “the actions of Baron Beyens would not be obstructed in any way by his minister.” Of course, Broqueville realized that this solution by itself would lead him back to square one. Moreover, instead of with Van den Heuvel, he would now have to cope with Baron Beyens, a functionary who not only had very strong ties to the Royal House but who also came from a corps of professionals whose autonomy in foreign policy execution the Cabinet Chief wished to reduce. Broqueville therefore suggested that “in case the King would have such desire, I would very gladly closely oversee the proceedings and, given my friendly relations with Baron Beyens, I am sure that things would quickly be finalized.”⁹²⁵ In other words, Broqueville proposed to act as a kind of supervisor to Beyens.

Broqueville, so it seemed, immediately perceived the weakness of his own reasoning, for he concluded his letter to the King with a complaint that Albert might well have read as a threat. “If I had over all my colleagues the authority that I possessed before the war,” he wrote, “I could impose more on them.” This was not the case any longer, the Cabinet Chief proceeded, suggesting that many of his colleagues now considered him a mere puppet whose strings were held by the King and who would be disposed of once the war was over. “I have been attacked too many times from the back to maintain the necessary authority to plainly impose upon the government a personality that it finds very unsympathetic,” Broqueville lamented.⁹²⁶ Albert failed to appreciate this attack on his judgement and did not show himself intimidated by Broqueville’s implicit warning that he would direct the authority of the Council of Ministers against the monarchy. “I have to protest against this thought, not to mention how little obliging it is towards me”, the King replied, stressing that he would name Baron Beyens as Foreign Minister “by virtue of my constitutional powers.” Moreover, Albert added, since Beyens was “the best of our diplomats”, his appointing the diplomat as Foreign Minister ad interim was an “example of duty in the public interest.” He therefore would not condone the attitude that, according to Broqueville, the members of the government would assume. On the contrary, Albert concluded somewhat provokingly, the ministers should be grateful to him.⁹²⁷

⁹²⁵ ARA, T 029, “Papiers de Charles de Broqueville”, n° 375, Charles de Broqueville to Albert of Belgium, 9 June 1915.

⁹²⁶ ARA, T 029, “Papiers de Charles de Broqueville”, n° 375, Charles de Broqueville to Albert of Belgium, 9 June 1915.

⁹²⁷ THIELEMANS, “Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916”, 582-583.

The Cabinet Chief complied, and promised to do what he could to put the King's wishes into practice.⁹²⁸ As such, it seems that Albert was well on his way to not only neutralize Broqueville's manoeuvre of sending both Van den Heuvel and Hymans abroad, but also to strengthen his control over Belgian foreign policy, with a Foreign Minister who would obey to no one but to the King and moreover perceived the country's interests in the same way the King did.⁹²⁹

Nevertheless, three obstacles still separated Albert's desire from its materialization. The first was Davignon, a politician who had never manifested any inclination to head the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but had only accepted, nine years earlier, out of deference to the monarchy. Leading the Belgian Foreign Ministry before the First World War meant, in the words of his son Henri, who quoted a former Belgian statesman, to "feed them", them being all diplomats accredited to Brussels. This Davignon had done for many years, largely paying himself for the sumptuous dinner parties that a Foreign Minister was expected to give any time a foreign diplomat arrived in Brussels or left the Belgian capital.⁹³⁰ Now that the functions of Foreign Minister had acquired great importance and the person holding them had become subject to national and international public scrutiny, Davignon would have to go. Who would not notice the humiliation that oozed from such action? After Broqueville had informed the King about Davignon's sentiments, Albert asked the latter to come to De Panne. During an audience that lasted almost two hours and that the King described as "painful", Davignon informed Albert that he would rather retire instead of accepting the proposed formula. The King tried to convince Davignon that his honour was not at stake, and that this was the only way to avoid a crisis. Davignon asked the King permission to think about it.⁹³¹ In the meantime, Broqueville had already informed Davignon's son Jacques, who was then second secretary at the Belgian legation in London. Jacques Davignon stressed how profoundly dishonouring the measure was and how much it would hurt his father's feelings.⁹³² Broqueville and the King agreed to take a few initiatives that could at least salve Davignon's

⁹²⁸ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 261; THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916", 585.

⁹²⁹ Explaining the episode of Beyens's nomination, Henri Haag argues that Broqueville felt profoundly humiliated that his object of veneration, that is the King, preferred another, more competent advisor, Beyens, over him. More generally, Haag seems to interpret the Cabinet Chief's behaviour during the war as completely dominated by sentiments of royalism, and refuses to discern any aspects of Broqueville's personality that could be interpreted as running counter to his loyalty to the King. See especially HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 355-360.

⁹³⁰ DAVIGNON, "Diplomatie", 505.

⁹³¹ THIELEMANS, "Les *Carnets de Guerre*", 205; THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916", 588-589.

⁹³² ARA, T 029, "Papiers de Charles de Broqueville", n° 375, Jacques Davignon to Charles de Broqueville, s.d. [June 1915].

wounded feelings. One of these was that the Foreign Minister would offer his resignation, and that the King would refuse it. This refusal would then be published in the Belgian law gazette *Le Moniteur belge*, so that everyone could read about this token of royal recognition. But Albert and Broqueville also knew perfectly well that Davignon's personal honour reflected upon the dignity of his family. Therefore, the King presented to Davignon "an undated Royal Decree countersigned by the Cabinet Chief, a Decree without precedent since 1830 and confirming to Mr. Davignon as well as to all his descendants ... the title of viscount."⁹³³ Possibly with the diplomatic career of his youngest son in mind, which would certainly benefit from such a title, Davignon accepted the formula.⁹³⁴ At the Council of Ministers held in early July 1915, Davignon even declared not to hold any bitterness against anyone, and stated that he would do all he could to have his departure attributed to health reasons only.⁹³⁵

This did nothing to remove the second obstacle to Baron Beyens's nomination as Foreign Minister: Davignon's colleagues. At the same Cabinet reunion, one minister reacted against the replacement of Davignon by proposing to his colleagues to vote for the Cabinet's collective resignation. Another minister claimed that the measure was actually directed against Broqueville himself. "One believes", he referred to the King, "that a government is possible without chief." The same minister argued that "this opinion is in contradiction with the entire political history and with everything that is going on in [...] parliamentary regimes." He added that "the policy that one wishes to follow uncovers the crown in a dangerous way and will be fatal to the Royalty itself." Many of his colleagues concurred and agreed that the government had to express its solidarity with its chief. Broqueville reacted by wallowing in self-pity. This was indeed but one episode of an entire campaign that for months had been directed against him, the Cabinet Chief found. He added that he was "the sole judge of his personal dignity", and that his behaviour was dictated by "his conscience and his concern for political honesty." Although these statements harboured some obvious criticisms directed, if not against Albert himself, than at least against the royal entourage, which was largely composed of Liberals, Broqueville stated that he wished to carry out the King's wishes. This decision, he declared, was taken right after the King had uttered them.⁹³⁶

⁹³³ ARA, T 029, "Papiers de Charles de Broqueville", n° 375, "Exposé de la situation fait à l'intention de Jacques Davignon" drafted by Charles de Broqueville, s.d. [June 1915].

⁹³⁴ Understandably, Davignon's oldest son Henri tells a more 'honourable' story in his memoirs. See DAVIGNON, *Souvenirs*, 276.

⁹³⁵ ARA, T 029, "Papiers de Charles de Broqueville", n° 375, Procès-verbal of the reunion of the Council of Ministers, 2 July 1915.

⁹³⁶ ARA, T 029, "Papiers de Charles de Broqueville", n° 375, Procès-verbal of the reunion of the Council of Ministers, 2 July 1915.

Unfortunately, the only known report of this Cabinet meeting is drafted by Broqueville himself, who might have slightly twisted its actual proceedings. However, this does not make less clear the fact that the Cabinet Chief was playing a double game. On the one hand, he exhibited his loyalty to the Crown and besought his colleagues for accepting Albert's decision, but on the other hand he stimulated their opposition against the royal decision. More specifically, Broqueville gave them arguments to disagree by reading out loud the letter he had sent to the King a month earlier, and in which he proposed to appoint Beyens as a kind of under-secretary of state who would assist Davignon like Van den Heuvel had done. The Council of Ministers unanimously decided to support this very solution, after which one minister stated that "the King fears most the pressure that the Minister of War [Broqueville] could exert on his colleague [of Foreign Affairs], and that therefore every solution that does not take away this fear from the King, would be rejected." Broqueville opposed that he had never given any advice to his colleague that ran counter to the vision of the King; quite the contrary, he had always done what he could to reconcile King and government. His efforts in this sphere succeeded, for the Council eventually accepted Albert's decision.⁹³⁷

As such, Broqueville had done all he could to minimize the damage. He had managed to strengthen both his position within the Cabinet and the government's unity against the King. Admittedly, he had lost a battle against Albert and would have to tolerate "the King's man", as he would refer to Baron Beyens, leading the Department that he would have wished to lead himself.⁹³⁸ Nevertheless, Broqueville had made sure that the very cold welcome that his colleagues would prepare for Beyens dropped further below zero.

The diplomat himself constituted the third obstacle towards the materialization of the King's desire to have him lead the Foreign Ministry. Would Beyens really be prepared to stir up such a venomous hornets' nest? He was, albeit not without making some reservations. In his letter of acceptance written to Broqueville, Beyens declared that "the King and the government could never appeal in vain to my devotion," and that "I would serve my country with all my powers, with all the wisdom that I am capable of." Moreover, he added, their conviction that he was the one to lead Belgian foreign policy in such difficult circumstances filled him with "pride and gratitude". Beyens nevertheless stressed that his ambitions had always laid elsewhere: "Career diplomat, I had only hoped to occupy another posting abroad." This comment actually served him as a useful leg up to his real reservation. Beyens wished to

⁹³⁷ ARA, T 029, "Papiers de Charles de Broqueville", n° 375, Procès-verbal of the reunion of the Council of Ministers, 2 July 1915; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 262.

⁹³⁸ For this reference, see PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 234.

work freely as Foreign Minister, that is in perfect accordance with both the King and the Government. This meant that if he would be attacked, he would not be able to accept the office.⁹³⁹ Beyens thus implicitly suggested that he accepted the functions as a diplomat, not as a politician. For the moment, however, he seemed to give his adversaries the benefit of the doubt. Less than a week later, he was sworn in by the King as Foreign Minister ad interim.⁹⁴⁰

Not long after the outbreak of the First World War, Belgian politicians chose to call in at the harbour of the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island. In the struggle that followed, they managed to set foot in the House on that resort. Its inhabitants certainly regretted the casualties on their side, although their grief was understandably greater for those of their peers whom they considered most meritorious and loyal. Many of them realized that the few politicians arriving on their island constituted only a vanguard and that they had to prepare for the possible arrival of other sailors. In the meantime, however, they experienced that not all these men were equally hostile to them, to their way of life and to their ideas. Nevertheless, the Captain of the government's ship had openly challenged the Ruler of the Belgian resort, and this was bound to have grave consequences. For the moment, however, it seemed that the latter had succeeded in spiking the guns of the Captain and of the most hostile members of his crew.

⁹³⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Charles de Broqueville, 16 July 1915.

⁹⁴⁰ BEYENS, *Un diplomate belge*, 34.

CHAPTER 7. THE RESTORATION I: THE KING'S MAN

In his letter of acceptance, Beyens made clear to Broqueville where he expected that the opposition towards his taking the lead of the Foreign Ministry would come from. "If I have to face any more hostility on the part of your colleagues or even the bad will of the functionaries of the Department of Foreign Affairs for reasons that I ignore," Beyens stated, "I would prefer to renounce the honour that you bestow upon me by proposing me to His Majesty's choice."⁹⁴¹

As adversaries of the policy that he wished to carry out, Beyens not only identified the members of the government but also those who would have to serve under him at the Foreign Ministry. This was a clear reference to the diplomats and bureaucrats of the so-called Congo generation. Already before the war, these young men had found common ground with imperial-minded politicians. This chapter investigates how Baron Beyens, as a diplomat turned Foreign Minister, responded to the challenges from the annexationist members of the government, of the Foreign Ministry and also of the Belgian press, with whom, as Beyens wrote in November 1916, both the members of the government and the Foreign Ministry's personnel were obliged to live "in a vile promiscuity."⁹⁴²

In this chapter, Beyens is studied as the Cabinet's foreign policy executive who was compelled to steer a middle course between the King and the government. As noted earlier, several historians have looked into Beyens's Foreign Ministership and the policy of neutrality that he pursued. Some of them have thus provided valuable leads for the narrative that follows.⁹⁴³ However, in reconstructing the struggle for the power over Belgian foreign policy between the Summers of 1915 and 1917, they have tended to focus too exclusively on King Albert and on Cabinet Chief de Broqueville. As such, they have largely overlooked the machinations of actors within the Foreign Ministry, such as Albert de Bassompierre and Pierre Orts, and in Belgian press circles, such as Fernand Neuray and Pierre Nothomb. Given that it most likely fell beyond the scope of their research questions, they have also neglected to look into how Beyens, as the first Belgian senior diplomat to become Foreign Minister, dealt with tensions between two important dimensions of his professional identity, namely

⁹⁴¹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Charles de Broqueville, 16 July 1915.

⁹⁴² See the introduction to his part.

⁹⁴³ See the works cited in the introduction to this part. In my opinion, the most valuable because disinterested view is provided by Michael F. Palo. I have primarily used his "The Question of Neutrality and Belgium's Security Dilemma during the First World War", *BTNG*, 30/1-2, 2000, 227-304.

that of the diplomat and that of the politician. This chapter will take these issues into account in order to write a political-cultural history of Belgian foreign policy execution during the Beyens years.



Fig. 2: Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens (1855-1934)

§ 1. Stirring Up the Hornet's Nest

Beyens and the Foreign Ministry

In his discussion of Belgian war aims sent to the King in late April 1915, Beyens had already subtly suggested that in case of his future appointment as Foreign Minister, he would not only face counteractions from the government. Beyens had indeed advised Albert to consult the Political Director Baron de Gaiffier, because this was “one of the best diplomats of our career” and one who did “not share most of my ideas about the peace treaty, but this is one more reason why I beg the King to offer him the opportunity to freely expound his [ideas].”⁹⁴⁴ About six weeks after the outbreak of war, the Political Direction had drafted a note about Belgian war aims. That note devoted considerable attention to the country's territorial

⁹⁴⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert of Belgium, 30 April 1915.

expansion, which would have to materialize at the expense of the Netherlands, Luxemburg, and Germany.⁹⁴⁵ Baron Beyens certainly respected Baron de Gaiffier as a diplomat. He therefore accepted that the Political Director held ideas that differed from his own. Contrary to Maria De Waele's unfounded claim that Gaiffier "grumbled more and more loudly about Beyens's passivity", throughout this chapter and especially at the end of the next chapter it will become clear that the respect between both diplomats was mutual, that Gaiffier observed the chain of command and respected Beyens's views on Belgian foreign policy.⁹⁴⁶ Beyens knew he could rely on his colleague of many years, and it appears that in April 1915, he advised the King to hear Gaiffier's opinion because the Political Director voiced a fairly moderate annexationist view and because he knew that Gaiffier, like himself, would put the King's desire before his own.

Most likely, Beyens perceived the actual threat to his new position as coming from the ranks immediately below the Political Director. Already before the war, a circle had formed at the Foreign Ministry which was composed of young diplomats and functionaries that languished for territorial expansion. The core of this circle was made up by Pierre Orts and Albert de Bassompierre, who was second in command at the Political Direction. The circle also included Baron Paul Guillaume's son Gustave, and diplomats of the highest aristocracy such as Count Léon d'Ursel and Prince Pierre de Caraman Chimay's cousin Philippe.⁹⁴⁷ In his memoirs, Orts described Bassompierre as "the most active element and the most open mind of the Political Direction." Both men knew each other from Bassompierre's previous occupation in the colonial administration, to which Orts was still detached. "Our conceptions were in agreement," Orts remembered, still appreciating that Bassompierre "greatly contributed to overcoming the resistance that the prevailing traditions in the Foreign Ministry offered against our African policy."⁹⁴⁸ Orts ranged Bassompierre in the Congo generation. Together they would struggle to obtain a greater Belgium within and outside of Europe.

Also several junior diplomats serving in postings on the European continent were enthusiastic about the perspective of returning to an enlarged country after the war. These included young de Kerchove, who after passing the diplomatic exam in 1912 was sent to Berlin to serve under Beyens.⁹⁴⁹ In early August 1915, he congratulated his former chief with

⁹⁴⁵ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 201-211; COOLSAET, *België*, 207.

⁹⁴⁶ See DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 131.

⁹⁴⁷ This network can be partly reconstructed thanks to the diary notes of Bassompierre. See especially especially the first booklet of SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 5 August until 28 December 1915.

⁹⁴⁸ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 22.

⁹⁴⁹ ADCB, 1913-1914, 151.

his appointment as Foreign Minister and wished him “the joy to put his signature on the treaty consecrating a new, enlarged Belgium.”⁹⁵⁰ Possibly Beyens managed to convince him that a greater Belgium was not the Department’s priority in these troubled times, for in a later letter Kerchove, then in The Hague, was happy to inform the Foreign Minister that in occupied Belgium people fully approved “the fight against the annexationists that we have been conducting under your direction.”⁹⁵¹

Beyens would never succeed in convincing the junior diplomats and functionaries of the Congo generation who worked at the Department in Le Havre. A letter from Gustave Guillaume written less than a week after the German army had invaded Belgium, illustrates how quickly they had come to regard the war foremost as an opportunity. After a few years spent with Bassompierre at the Political Direction, Guillaume was sent in March 1914 to Bern in order to serve as first secretary under the senior diplomat Baron Paul de Groote. When the war broke out, however, he was in Brussels. Over the next months he would follow the Foreign Ministry personnel to Antwerp and eventually to Le Havre. “We are working like crazy here,” young Guillaume wrote on 10 August 1914 to De Groote, “but what a joy to witness the birth of a great Belgium!” Guillaume did acknowledge that the war was “a horrible thing for our unfortunate country” but emphasized once more that “it will rise from it, I have not a single doubt, enlarged and fortified.”⁹⁵² As Henri Davignon remembered in his memoirs, Guillaume had confided these same words to him a week earlier, that is the day before the German army invaded Belgium.⁹⁵³

In Brussels and Antwerp in the first weeks after the war, Guillaume had taken up his former duties as the collaborator of Bassompierre, who was the actual author of the Political Direction’s note on Belgian war aims. In drafting this note, he had drawn inspiration from the latent desire that throughout the nineteenth century lingered on in courtly and diplomatic circles and was aimed at recuperating the territories which Belgium had ‘lost’ to the Netherlands in 1839. After the outbreak of the war, Bassompierre and like-minded colleagues ‘rediscovered’ the work of the former leading Foreign Ministry official Emile Banning, whose *Considérations politiques sur la défense de la Meuse* stated that Belgian possession of both Zeeland Flanders and Limburg constituted the best guarantees for withstanding future attacks

⁹⁵⁰ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51, André de Kerchove de Denterghem to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 10 August 1915.

⁹⁵¹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 52, André de Kerchove de Denterghem to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 20 December 1916.

⁹⁵² ARA, I 222, n° 168, “Papiers de Groote”, Gustave Guillaume to Paul de Groote, 10 August 1914.

⁹⁵³ DAVIGNON, *Souvenirs*, 220.

from the German army.⁹⁵⁴ In the course of 1915, this work quickly became part of the canon of Belgian annexationism.

When the officials of the Foreign Ministry arrived in Le Havre in mid-October 1914, it did not take long before the annexationists at the Foreign Ministry found common ground with the Christian Democratic members of the government who held similar views, such as Carton de Wiart and Renkin. If Pierre Orts is to be believed, and the exceptional lack of reticence that peppers his unpublished memoirs suggests that he mostly is when he is not writing about his personal accomplishments, he established a firm understanding with Renkin not long after the Christian Democrat had taken charge of the administration of the Congo in 1908. “The resolution I manifested had gained me his sympathy,” Orts wrote about Renkin, who had apparently seen in him “a type that differed from the quite unfavourable idea that he had of the Belgian diplomat.” This probably had to do with first sight impressions, Orts believed, illustrating his claim with a visibly striking comparison: “Like any self-respecting ‘Monsieur’, in the afternoon I donned a top hat; Christian Democrat Renkin wore a soft, broad brimmed felt hat, which is the exterior sign that attested to his strong democratic convictions.” Aware that Renkin was a self-conscious dresser, Orts ostensibly wondered whether “the contrast offered by these head coverings did not reveal a profound opposition of feelings, incompatible with a true collaboration.”⁹⁵⁵ Surely, it did not. Orts claimed elsewhere in his memoirs that, from the start, he “worked together with Renkin in the most perfect confidence” and “in an atmosphere of sympathy and comprehension.”⁹⁵⁶ In March 1915, Bassompierre joined Carton de Wiart in a car-ride to De Panne. This gave him the opportunity to talk with the Justice Minister about “the territorial questions that will rise at the peace settlement.” Bassompierre was happy to rapport that Carton shared his ideas, which seems to have provided the basis for a friendship between both men.⁹⁵⁷

Baron Beyens knew perfectly well that annexationist ideas ran rampant in the rooms of the *Villa Hollandaise*, the Foreign Ministry’s residence whose name seemed to serve as an indicator for the ambitions of its younger occupants. One week before he wrote his letter of acceptance to Broqueville, Beyens visited his future collaborators at Sainte-Adresse. According to Bassompierre, Beyens “took a great interest in what I told him about Luxembourg, the Scheldt, etc.,” but felt that “our policy must be based on the Dutch alliance,

⁹⁵⁴ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 201-205.

⁹⁵⁵ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 21.

⁹⁵⁶ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 10-11.

⁹⁵⁷ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 15 March 1915. See also p. 29 on 17 March in the same diary.

or friendship at any rate, and therefore he could not see the way to any increase of territory on the side of Holland.” Beyens’s conversations with Bassompierre gave him an idea about the internal opposition he could expect when taking over the Department. From what can be deduced from Bassompierre’s diaries, which provide an almost day-to-day overview of the functionary’s activities written in a strange mixture of French and – sometimes quite broken – English, Beyens initially chose to focus on communalities rather than on differences of opinion. Speaking of neutrality, he disagreed with the conservative opinions of the retired Léon Arendt and others who wished to hold on to this status even after the war would be over. “We have shown our political maturity and I want no more limits to our independence,” Beyens declared. Bassompierre “quite concurred.”⁹⁵⁸

Yet the harmony between Beyens and Bassompierre would not last long. In early December 1915, slumbering sentiments of mutual distrust flared up during a discussion about the release of less than a dozen German prisoners. In the absence of Gaiffier, Bassompierre had drafted a note in order to detain them as collateral for the thousands of Belgians that Germany held captive. Beyens judged that the acceptance of a papal proposition for the release of war prisoners by both the German and Belgian governments required their release. According to Bassompierre, the discussion turned sour when Beyens told him “you are too young, you do not have the mental maturity to be Political Director, which, by the way, you are not.” Bassompierre claimed that these statements shocked him to the extent that he offered his resignation. Apparently, Beyens refused to accept. The Foreign Minister, Bassompierre confided to his diaries, reiterated the age argument instead: “I have much more experience than you, I am sixty years old. Your ideas about politics are too young and enthusiast.” Beyens would subsequently have reproached Bassompierre that he supported the annexationist campaign of *Le XXe siècle*, whose “preposterous claims ... exasperate our Allies.” Bassompierre admitted that he favoured that campaign. To him, it was the best means to show the world that many Belgians desired expansion of the country’s territory. According to Bassompierre, Beyens then got excited and declared “I put as axiomatic no acquisition of German territory, no acquisition of Dutch territory.” Beyens would have also said that the Dutch government would never agree, upon which Bassompierre had begged to differ, stating that “from my point of view, it would never be a case of robbing [Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders] but of exchanging or buying.” After some further discussion, Bassompierre reported, he and Beyens parted “without cordiality”.⁹⁵⁹

⁹⁵⁸ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 28 July 1915.

⁹⁵⁹ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 9 December 1915.

Bassompierre's version of his dispute with Baron Beyens reveals several aspects of the dynamics at work in the Belgian Foreign Ministry during the second year of the First World War. Apparently, the generational thinking that pervaded the memoirs of Pierre Orts, is also very present in contemporary documents like Bassompierre's diaries. Although Bassompierre was not an actual member of the Belgian diplomatic corps (yet would become one after the war), he shared the sentiments of many young diplomats who felt subdued by older colleagues, many of which, they believed, lacked initiative and held outdated views of Belgium's foreign policy interests.

Confronted with a glass ceiling after the retirement of Arendt and his replacement by Gaiffier in 1912, Bassompierre proposed to the Foreign Minister and to the Secretary-General to go to China as a representative of the Belgian government. More than the urge to travel and the wish to serve his country, Bassompierre invoked career ambitions as his main motive to set off on this Asian adventure. In his letter to Van der Elst, he made it known that his conditions comprised the preservation of his seniority and the promise to return to the Political Direction after three years. "Gaiffier is in the saddle now", Bassompierre remarked, so "this is my plan: ... I am thirty-nine since eight days. I have twenty-six years ahead before the age of retirement. That is a long time ... I would like to get a bit of fresh air for three years. At my return, I will have acquired the prestige of the mister who has travelled. That is not useless for a Political Director." Having plainly stated his ambitions, Bassompierre failed to hide the bitterness that Arendt's succession by someone other than himself, had caused him. "Three years will not render me more inept to render services here," he concluded, "just like the ten years that Gaiffier has passed outside of the Department have not incapacitated him to succeed Mr. Arendt."⁹⁶⁰

It is unclear why, but Bassompierre had not left Europe when the First World War broke out. His ambitions, however, had quickly become known to most officials employed by the Foreign Ministry, including Baron Beyens.⁹⁶¹ Bassompierre's dispute with the latter more than three years later led him to complain to Van der Elst that Beyens had addressed him "in a profoundly humiliating language." Bassompierre declared that "I am forty-two years old", that is "old enough to think by myself." Van der Elst apparently tried to gloss over Beyens's

⁹⁶⁰ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 49, Albert de Bassompierre to Léon van der Elst, 17 August 1912.

⁹⁶¹ AMBZ, PF 31, "Eugène-Napoléon Beyens", Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, 9 September 1912.

alleged behaviour, stating that “the Minister could be forgiven because he was extremely irritated for always having to face opposition, which he partly attributes to our actions.”⁹⁶²

The Secretary-General’s reply to Bassompierre leads one to suspect that Beyens had at least one kindred spirit at the Foreign Ministry, and not the least. Van der Elst had been a close confidant of Leopold II and an avid supporter of the second Belgian King’s imperialist policies. This had earned him the succession of Lambermont in 1905. Yet leading the Department had gradually made him aware that an active colonial policy could have negative implications for Belgium’s position within Europe. Moreover, far more than a proponent of a greater Belgium, Van der Elst was a loyal servant of the dynasty. If this meant observing a policy of strict neutrality after King Albert had mounted the throne, than this had to be done. Albert greatly appreciated the Secretary-General’s loyalty, and consulted him on most major international and domestic political issues.⁹⁶³ When Baron Beyens took over the Foreign Ministry, his collaboration with Van der Elst initially passed off rather coldly, most likely due to the inversion of hierarchy that the Secretary General had to endure and which, in much the same way as in the case of Bassompierre, might not have agreed with his feelings of personal honour.⁹⁶⁴ Soon after, however, a cordial relationship developed between these two foremost defenders of Belgian neutrality and diplomatic modesty in Le Havre.⁹⁶⁵

This friendship and Van der Elst’s attachment to the royal policy of neutrality induced him to teach Bassompierre some respect for the hierarchy within the Ministry. When their conversation turned towards Beyens’s allegation that Bassompierre sympathized with the annexationist campaign conducted by the editor of *Le XXe siècle*, Van der Elst apparently stated that “a functionary should not talk with the outside [i.e. with people from outside the Department] if his ideas do not concord with those of his minister.” Bassompierre denied to have any connection with *Le XXe siècle*, but admitted that “six months ago, I have had a few conversations with one or two ministers ... with whom I ‘had’ to talk to avoid looking like an imbecile who knew nothing of the matters of his competence.”⁹⁶⁶

⁹⁶² SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 10 December 1915.

⁹⁶³ See especially the letters from Albert to Van der Elst, and the latter’s notes of conversations with the King in ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 2 and n° 3. See also BITSCH, *La Belgique*, 250-251 ; and VELAERS, *Albert I*, 145 and 173.

⁹⁶⁴ According to Bassompierre, Van der Elst had even declared in early 1915 that he would resign if Beyens took over the Foreign Ministry. Bassompierre defined sentiments of humiliation as the Secretary-General’s main motive for this statement. See SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 28 July 1915.

⁹⁶⁵ VANDEWOUDE, Emile, *Inventaire des papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst*, Brussels, 1978, 8-10.

⁹⁶⁶ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 10 December 1915. The underlining is Bassompierre’s.

Bassompierre was not exactly telling the truth. His diaries reveal several contradictions between what he reports to have done and thought on the one hand, and the reproduction of his conversations with ideological adversaries on the other hand. This makes it likely that their author intended them as accounts for his eyes only, written very soon after the time of perception and with little or no revision afterwards. Bassompierre's disposition of events after his dispute with Beyens provides an illustration of these practices. Van der Elst was actually only the sixth person that Bassompierre consulted in order to know how to react to what he perceived as a humiliation. He had first gone to Gustave Guillaume, then to the Colonial Minister Renkin, who had told him to go to Broqueville immediately, which he did. The next day Bassompierre had first talked about the event with Political Director Gaiffier, and then with Orts, who was at that time attached to the Colonial Ministry and thus strictly speaking no insider. Via Orts, Bassompierre had become particularly close with Renkin, who had admonished him not to hand in his resignation. "You are a soldier and you have to continue to fight for your ideas," Renkin had told him, explaining that whereas "in the trenches they take bullets and grenades, you take hits of a different kind." This being the case, Renkin advised him, "let your patriotism serve as your shield."⁹⁶⁷

Bassompierre not only conversed about internal affairs with members of the government. He also violated the Department's house rules during encounters with the nationalist publicist Pierre Nothomb, who had quickly become a close friend of the annexationists at the Foreign Ministry.⁹⁶⁸ During his Law studies at the Catholic University of Louvain, Nothomb had become a close friend of Renkin's son Paul. After graduating, he obtained an internship at the lawyer's office of the Justice Minister Henry Carton de Wiart, who employed him as private secretary after the war broke out. While Renkin and Carton ranked among the pioneers of Christian Democracy in the last decades of the 1890s, Nothomb belonged to a second generation of Christian Democrats whose progressive ideas about social policy and the introduction of unweighted universal suffrage went hand in hand with their advocacy of nationalism and their criticisms of a dysfunctional Belgian Parliament.⁹⁶⁹

In his diaries, Bassompierre often wrote about spontaneous meetings of his circle of kindred spirits. At one occasion in late December 1915, not long after his dispute with Baron Beyens, Bassompierre was paying Orts a visit at the Colonial Ministry, where also Nothomb

⁹⁶⁷ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 9 and 10 December 1915.

⁹⁶⁸ On Nothomb's activities during the First World War, see the essays in PETIT, R. (ed.), *Pierre Nothomb et le Nationalisme Belge de 1914 à 1930*, Arlon, 1980. On the annexationist's circle, see also DAVIGNON, *Souvenirs*, 280; HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 417.

⁹⁶⁹ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 300-301.

happened to lounge about. The trio ran into Renkin, who informed them about a reunion of the Council of Ministers held the day before. The Colonial Minister claimed that he had lashed out against Beyens and had forced him to accept that the Scheldt question needed a solution. Such solution, Renkin is reported to have stated, could only entail the annexation of Zeeland Flanders and not some kind of juridical formula of co-sovereignty, which Beyens seemed to favour. Renkin then read to Orts, Nothomb, and Bassompierre, some fragments of a letter he had written to the Foreign Minister about these issues. Bassompierre described this letter as “full of patriotism” and the passages that Renkin had read aloud as “pieces of the purest patriotism.” Bassompierre reacted by building on Renkin’s reasoning in a way that made it clear to the Colonial Minister that he shared this conception of Belgian patriotism. Bassompierre’s reaction also told Renkin that rather than a soldier, he would like to be a doctor. If Belgium would obtain co-sovereignty over the Scheldt without annexation, Bassompierre argued, Zeeland Flanders would become “an organ that has lost its function, like the appendix, and that has to be removed when it becomes a cause of irritation, or even before.” Seemingly pleased with his own ingenuity in matters of organic metaphorical expressions, Bassompierre exclaimed that Zeeland Flanders “is Holland’s appendicitis.” Much to the agreement of the other listeners, Nothomb immediately added that “Limburg is her hernia, and as true friends we should give her the double operation.” Bassompierre truly believed in the cogency of his appendix theory, for a few months later he even exposed it to Van der Elst. The Secretary-General held a different opinion.⁹⁷⁰

These passages from Bassompierre’s diaries reveal how the First World War brought about a union of minds who had held very different opinions about many domestic social and political issues. Christian Democratic politicians like Renkin and Carton de Wiart, and publicists like Pierre Nothomb found common ground with representatives of more conservative traditions such as the Foreign Ministry official Bassompierre and the doctrinary liberal diplomat Orts. Nationalism, and annexationism as its most expressive contemporary manifestation, seems to have functioned as the glue which united these minds. The basis of their understanding indeed resided in an organic conception of the Belgian nation. All of them viewed their country as a body that needed to develop itself, to grow in order to stay healthy. As such, true patriots could not allow that this body’s circulation, which they considered the Scheldt and Meuse streams to represent, was pinched off by a neighbouring body. In mid-January 1916, Bassompierre described this body as a “family relation – sort of first cousin,

⁹⁷⁰ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 30 December 1915 and 7 April 1916.

who is our friend as long as we claim no service from her and our enemy if she can do us harm without showing her hand.” Bassompierre was indeed convinced that “Holland ... detests us at the bottom of her heart.”⁹⁷¹

Like Belgian nationalist ideology before the war, Bassompierre’s diaries also attest to the conviction that the Belgian body could not deploy all its strength because it was held back by organisms from within. By the end of 1915 his image of who these internal enemies were had taken a clear shape. In the reflexions that he inserted in his diaries after his discussion with Van der Elst about his dispute with Beyens, Bassompierre initiated the preparation of the character assassination of these men. The Secretary-General’s request that he respected hierarchy within the ministry, elicited from Bassompierre the thought that “Van der Elst, when he was chef du cabinet, did he have for the Secretary-General or for the Minister the respect and the deference that he demands now from the Political Direction? Did he not sabotage Lambermont?” Also opposition against Beyens was perfectly legitimated, Bassompierre then seemed to want to convince himself. In 1907, Beyens temporarily served as second in command at the Political Direction. Bassompierre claimed to have seen him at that time “in a tremendous rage with the King, the Minister, and Van der Elst because the King had up to two times corrected one of his drafts.” He made this comment to serve as an extra proof that Beyens tolerated no one to hold different opinions than his own. According to Bassompierre, the Foreign Minister had indeed declared to the functionaries of the Political Direction that they could only write notes which complied with his ideas. Apparently, Gaiffier had told Bassompierre “with tears in his eyes” that Beyens’s statements constituted “a true humiliation” for him, but that he accepted nevertheless. Contrary to Beyens and Van der Elst, Gaiffier was certainly not portrayed as an enemy. Bassompierre did, however, stress the Political Director’s weaknesses and inability to stand up to the Foreign Minister and the Secretary-General.⁹⁷²

Beyens and the Government

Judging from Bassompierre’s diaries, the winter of 1915-1916 not only saw the forming of a coalition against Beyens that ran across the government, the press, and the Foreign Affairs Department, it also witnessed the first serious attacks on Beyens’s policy from within the

⁹⁷¹ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 12 January 1916.

⁹⁷² SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 13 and 21 December 1915.

government. Especially Broqueville and Renkin would not allow this non-politician to dictate policy. In Autumn 1915, they had each provided a separate prelude to these attacks.

In October 1915, Broqueville went behind Beyens's back to enter upon negotiations for the bestowal of decorations upon members of the Spanish government. Beyens wrote to the King that he had asked Broqueville for an explanation, but had gotten orders set in a very hostile language instead. "Orders I have only to receive from Your Majesty," Beyens declared, adding that it gravely bothered him that the Cabinet Chief infringed on his areas of competence. Beyens regretted that "for the moment His Majesty has three Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Mr de Broqueville, Mr Davignon, and I who assume the responsibility."⁹⁷³ Beyens was not just alluding to his status as temporary Foreign Minister. It particularly bothered him that Davignon still lounged about in Le Havre while it had been agreed that he would take sick leave. In letters to his wife, Beyens attributed Davignon's prolonged stay in Le Havre to Broqueville's machinations. "Broqueville is evidently playing a double game," Beyens confided, meaning that the Cabinet Chief on the one hand kept promising him that Davignon would soon leave, and on the other hand seemed to incite Davignon to show up at the Foreign Ministry, attend Council reunions, and appear at other occasions where he could undermine Beyens's authority as actual Foreign Minister.⁹⁷⁴

When Beyens informed the King about these obstructions, Albert limited himself to expressing his surprise. "Preoccupied with other, much more perturbing questions," Beyens wrote to his wife, "our Sovereign hardly takes an interest in these personal questions."⁹⁷⁵ Autumn 1915 indeed required all the King's attention, as he was conducting warfare on the Belgian front and at the same time starting up secret negotiations between his confident Emile Waxweiler, a sociology professor with Liberal sympathies, and Count Hans von Törring-Jettenbach, the Belgian Queen's brother-in-law who represented the German side. Törring would break off these talks in February 1916.⁹⁷⁶

A second prelude to the attacks on Beyens came from Renkin. In late November 1915, Beyens had sent instructions to Belgian diplomats in London, Paris, and Saint Petersburg. The Foreign Minister declared that for the duration of the war, the Belgian government would not

⁹⁷³ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert of Belgium, s.d. [early October 1915. See also, in the same archive and number, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Charles de Broqueville, 1 October 1915.

⁹⁷⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 3, 9, and 23 November 1915.

⁹⁷⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 9 November 1915.

⁹⁷⁶ PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 235. For more details, see VELAERS, *Albert I*, 262-283 and 289-292; and HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 492-496.

conclude any alliances. With regards to the post-war period, the instructions stated that the system of obligatory neutrality had to be replaced, possibly by some kind of voluntary neutrality, and that Belgium would not seek territorial compensations.⁹⁷⁷ According to Bassompierre, Renkin “had brought down his fist on the table” and “declared that he would approve the letters if a door was left open to territorial acquisitions.” Bassompierre also claims that Renkin handed Beyens a document with his views on Belgian foreign policy, telling the Foreign Minister “you think that the leaders of Belgian politics only occupy themselves with parochial quarrels. You are wrong. There are some who know the value of international politics and who have a plan for it. You have to reckon with that.”⁹⁷⁸ Influenced by the ideas of his collaborators, Renkin thus pleaded for the introduction of a nationalist foreign policy. More broadly, he also voiced a widespread sentiment in government circles, namely that Belgium’s executive politicians now felt that their rightful place was at the centre of the international political game. This stance contrasted sharply with their passive pre-war attitude.⁹⁷⁹

It is unclear how Beyens reacted to these statements. On the one hand, they expressed the claim of the Colonial Minister that he could rightfully intrude upon the Foreign Minister’s area of competence, which was exactly what had offended Beyens in the case of Broqueville two months earlier. On the other hand, they constituted an acknowledgment by Renkin of the greater prestige of foreign policy over domestic politics. Perhaps, in the eyes of Beyens, Renkin failed to grasp the respect for the traditional executors of foreign policy that this finding would have entailed. Contrary to Renkin, Beyens was still convinced that diplomacy would best be left to diplomats. Surely, it would be wrong to state that Beyens opposed any territorial expansion. Like King Albert, he did favour the incorporation of Luxemburg, provided that the Luxembourgers approved by referendum. The Council of Ministers knew this, for Beyens had exposed to them his ideas during a reunion held in mid-August 1915.⁹⁸⁰ In December 1915, Bassompierre confided to his diaries that the Foreign Minister had even described the Grand Duchy as “Belgian soil.”⁹⁸¹ This, however, did not mean that Beyens deemed appropriate to publicly proclaim such projects while Belgium was still at war.

Pressure from the majority of the Cabinet led Beyens, a few days after Renkin had allegedly thumped his fist on the table, to send new instructions to Belgian diplomats. These

⁹⁷⁷ PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 262.

⁹⁷⁸ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 4 December 1915.

⁹⁷⁹ DEFOORT, Erik, “L’Action française dans le nationalisme belge”, *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 7/1-2, 1976, 115.

⁹⁸⁰ PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 233.

⁹⁸¹ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 9 December 1915.

contained no more reference to Belgium's voluntary neutrality. As such, they opened the door for an alliance policy. In the minds of the annexationists, this constituted an important step towards territorial expansion because the country's powerful allies would compensate Belgian war efforts while redrawing the map of Europe after the war. Since Autumn 1915, the Cabinet Ministers Renkin, Carton de Wiart, and Segers indeed heavily pleaded for Belgian adherence to the Pact of London. Broqueville did not openly take part in this campaign but rather acted through Neuray of *Le XXe Siècle*.⁹⁸² From outside of the government, they received support from Nothomb, who had drafted the so-called *mémoire des jeunes*, a document signed by several prominent young journalists and publicists (as well as by a few future diplomats) and which advocated an alliance with France and Great Britain as the only means to obtain the realization of Belgium's 'natural' frontiers after the war. This would entail incorporation into the Belgian state of Luxembourg, Limburg, Zeeland Flanders and a few German cantons with a French speaking population. Nothomb delivered the document to the government just before the Cabinet meeting in late December 1915.⁹⁸³

Beyens and the Press

In a letter sent to the King in mid-November 1915, Beyens had already written that "this is really not the time to raise the question of the territorial aggrandizement of Belgium, about which *Le XXe Siècle* lectures its readers almost every day." He wondered "why Mr Neuray does not understand that by advertising claims to the province of the left bank of the Rhine – for it is there that his plans and those of M. Pierre Nothomb lie today, he provides ammunition to the Pan-Germanists, who demand the annexation of our country." The Foreign Minister therefore regretted the impossibility "to give *Le XXe siècle* advice which it would not care for."⁹⁸⁴ Beyens's reflections provide a useful leg up to an analysis of his relations with the Belgian press in the first months of his ministership. They particularly reveal that the annexationist claims had been turning up in the press for quite some time and were directed towards different territories, that the loudest voices uttering these claims belonged to Fernand Neuray and Pierre Nothomb, and that the Foreign Minister seemed to resign to his powerlessness in influencing them.

⁹⁸² PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 233 and 262.

⁹⁸³ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 451-456; WILLEQUET, Jacques, "Gaston Barbanson, promoteur d'une 'grande Belgique' en 1914-1918", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*, 48/2, 349-351.

⁹⁸⁴ AKP, AE, n° 39, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert of Belgium, 14 November 1915.

Whereas Nothomb had manifested his nationalism already before the war, Neuray only appropriated these ideas after the events of August 1914. His disappointment about the failure of what he labelled as “international Catholic solidarity” led him to propagate the predominance of the “national interest” and filled him with hatred against the German people. Neuray launched the annexationist campaign of *Le XXe siècle* in early 1915, when he had his editorial “Notre Alsace” followed ten days later by Pierre Nothomb’s article “Notre Alsace-Lorraine”.⁹⁸⁵ The designation “Notre Alsace” was already before the war a topos in nationalist literature about the “robbery” of Luxembourg from Belgium after the 1839 Treaty of London and, as we have seen, had incited the nationalist journalists Léon Souguenet and Louis Dumont-Wilden, who in the course of 1915 became one of Neuray’s collaborators, to undertake a journey to the Alsace.⁹⁸⁶ Nothomb and Neuray argued that the people of Luxemburg were for the Belgians what the people of Alsace-Lorraine were for the French, namely “brothers separated ... by an unfortunate war and an unjust treaty.” The argument that the Luxembourgers had always been Belgians was accompanied by attacks on the allegedly Germanophile Luxembourgian Grand Duchess. *Le XXe siècle* also published similar articles by other publicists. The most prominent of these was Maurice des Ombiaux, a nationalist journalist and writer whom Broqueville hired as private secretary and entrusted with propagating the Belgian cause.⁹⁸⁷ From late May 1915 onwards, Neuray also directed *Le XXe siècle*’s attention towards the Netherlands. In less than six weeks, he published three of his own articles devoted to Emile Banning’s *Considérations politiques sur la défense de la Meuse*, and two by ‘Memor’, allegedly a Belgian soldier who combined his activities in the trenches with reflecting on Belgian war aims in general and on Neuray’s annexationist articles in particular. In all of these pieces, as yet implicit claims to Limburg and Zeeland Flanders accompanied appeals to Belgian diplomats and politicians to accept “Banning’s testament” as a line of action “so that the blood of the Belgian people will not have flown in vain.”⁹⁸⁸ In the early Summer of 1915, journalists of *Le XXe siècle* started a campaign to acquire part of the German Rhineland. Louis Dumont-Wilden and especially Maurice des Ombiaux ranked among the fiercest advocates of these annexations, which in their opinion would have

⁹⁸⁵ DELHEZ, Jean-Claude, “Fernand Neuray, le plus grand journaliste belge de son temps (1874-1934)”, *Annales de l’Institut Archéologique du Luxembourg*, 108-109, 1987-1988, 69 and 72-73.

⁹⁸⁶ DEFOORT, “Het Belgische nationalisme”, 527.

⁹⁸⁷ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 400 and 403; DEVLEESHOUWER, Robert, “L’opinion publique et les revendications territoriales belges à la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale”, in *Mélanges offerts à G. Jacquemyns*, Brussels, 1968, 209-211.

⁹⁸⁸ NEURAY, Fernand, “Le mémoire Banning”, *Le XXe siècle*, 21 and 25 May and 13 June 1915; MEMOR, “La Belgique nouvelle”, *Le XXe siècle*, 19 and 27 June 1915. The quote is from Neuray’s 13 June article.

facilitated the defence of Belgium's eastern border and safeguarded the future of the port of Antwerp.⁹⁸⁹

After the outbreak of war *Le XXe siècle* had soon established itself as the most influential Belgian newspaper abroad, particularly due to its presence in Le Havre and its backing by Broqueville.⁹⁹⁰ Most members of the Belgian expat community in England, however, relied on *L'Indépendance belge*, which stood ideologically close to the views of Paul Hymans, the minister plenipotentiary in London.⁹⁹¹ After Neuray had launched *Le XXe siècle*'s annexationist campaign, it did not take long before the editors of *L'Indépendance belge* reacted. They deemed "inappropriate and absolutely premature to raise the question of the greater Belgium" and explained that since only "a patch of Belgian territory" remained unoccupied, they believed that such a polemic was "little justified and possibly maladroit."⁹⁹² Beyens will certainly have appreciated these statements and will have also felt some satisfaction reading that journalists of *L'Indépendance belge* sometimes explicitly praised both his actions as a diplomat in Berlin and his refusal to formulate territorial demands at the expense of the Netherlands and Luxemburg whilst directing Belgian foreign policy.⁹⁹³

Yet also on the British Isles, Neuray's propaganda found ready recipients. Particularly Jules Claes, the director of the conservative Catholic newspaper *La Métropole*, which was published in London from October 1914 onwards, turned his newspaper into arguably the most nationalist and annexationist press organ of the Belgians in exile.⁹⁹⁴ In mid-November 1915, immediately after he had complained to the King about *Le XXe siècle*'s annexationist plans for the Rhineland, Beyens let it be known to Claes that the government did not appreciate reading similar territorial claims in *La Métropole*. Claes replied that "applying German 'law' to the Germans would constitute a lesson that would not fail to be approved by the neutrals" and that "the thesis of the annexation of German territory has been expounded and defended repeatedly in *Le XXe siècle*, considered everywhere as the unofficial organ."

⁹⁸⁹ DES OMBIAUX, Maurice, "L'espérance de la Belgique", *Le XXe siècle*, 29 June 1915; DUMONT-WILDEN, Louis, "L'avenir de la Belgique", *Le XXe siècle*, 13 July 1915; DES OMBIAUX, Maurice, "Notre frontière de l'Est", *Le XXe siècle*, 23 and 26 September, 5 and 20 October, and 18 November 1915.

⁹⁹⁰ DEFOORT, "L'Action française", 119-120.

⁹⁹¹ Alfred Lemonnier, the director of *L'Indépendance belge* was even labelled in foreign media as "the mouthpiece of Belgians in London, see *The New York Times Current History: The European War*, 6, 1917, 1081.

⁹⁹² ANONYMOUS [Editors' Note], "La plus grande Belgique", *L'Indépendance belge*, 16 March 1915.

⁹⁹³ See NODRENGE, Pierre, "Lettre du Havre", *L'Indépendance belge*, 3 September 1915; and ROYER, Emile, "L'homme qui l'a voulue", *L'Indépendance belge*, 9 October 1915.

⁹⁹⁴ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 417.

This, Claes argued, justified the publication of these claims in other Belgian newspapers as well, especially considering that public opinion needed to be informed.⁹⁹⁵

In his letter to the King written five days earlier, Beyens had stated that urging Neuray to refrain from formulating claims for territorial expansion would not avail. Yet the Foreign Minister did admonish Claes for similar actions. Beyens's reluctance to reproach Neuray had little to do with respect for the liberty of the press, which in times of war could never be as complete as it was before. Rather, he knew that Broqueville and Renkin supported *Le XXe siècle*'s campaign. In his letter to the King, he was implicitly appealing to Albert to exert his influence on these ministers in order for the annexationist campaign to stop. Of course, Beyens also knew perfectly well that the press was more than before the war a force that had to be reckoned with. *Le XXe siècle* in particular had become ever more prominent as Belgium's voice abroad. When Beyens sent his letter to the King in November 1915, the annexationist journalists of *Le XXe siècle* moreover still tended to put him in a favourable light. About a month earlier, Maurice des Ombiaux had published an overly adulating review of Beyens's book *L'Allemagne avant la guerre*, which had even shook his negative preconceptions of the quality of Belgian diplomats. "Why would I try to dissimulate it," Des Ombiaux wrote, "we were really astonished to find that we dispose of such a talented diplomat."⁹⁹⁶ In the light of these comments, Beyens might have judged it wiser not to jeopardize the fairly positive disposition of some of *Le XXe siècle*'s journalists while their territorial demands still received little international resonance.

Despite the praise that Beyens received for his book on German war guilt, opposition against his person and his policy was gradually taking shape. Members of the government, Belgian publicists and journalists in Le Havre, and officials and diplomats at the *Villa Hollandaise* all set out to conspire against the new Foreign Minister. Admittedly, Beyens could count on Van der Elst and would not be thwarted by Gaiffier. He also had King Albert's support. However, in the royal entourage, as Bassompierre was very pleased to find, several influential advisers favoured Belgian territorial expansion and the abandonment of neutrality. On New Year's Day 1916, Bassompierre reported that General Harry Jungbluth, Head of the Royal Military House, "is completely won over to our ideas." Less than two weeks later, he could add Jules Ingenbleek, the King's private secretary, to the list of those who were "quite

⁹⁹⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 52, Jules Claes to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 19 November 1915.

⁹⁹⁶ DES OMBIAUX, Maurice, "L'Allemagne avant la guerre", *Le XXe siècle*, 15 October 1915. See also ANONYMOUS, "L'entretien historique du 4 août 1914", *Le XXe siècle*, 4 August 1915.

with us.”⁹⁹⁷ Yet, as Henri Haag has argued, Ingenbleek and Jungbluth were not actual supporters of annexationism, but acted as spies for Albert, informing the King of the expansionists’ machinations.⁹⁹⁸

Apart from that, several persons from Albert’s entourage openly sided with Beyens and Van der Elst. The most important among them was the diplomat Count Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, who in the summer of 1916 would become chief of the King’s cabinet. More than a year earlier, Van der Elst, possibly to satisfy a royal request, had sounded him out on the question of neutrality. Van den Steen had responded that “I am still of the old school of Arendt,” by which he meant that “armed and guaranteed neutrality still seems to me the best formula.”⁹⁹⁹ Around this time, Van den Steen had also assured the Secretary-General that the latter’s collaboration with Beyens would work out just fine, and was happy to find, a few months later, that his predictions had come true.¹⁰⁰⁰ Van den Steen fully endorsed the decision to appoint as Foreign Minister “a diplomat of incontestable value rather than a political parliamentarian.”¹⁰⁰¹ This, he might have thought, would provide more guarantees for the diplomats’ professional future. Van den Steen also commented on the opposition that Beyens and Van der Elst had to face in Le Havre: “The portrait that you have made of our megalomaniac compatriots seems to me of a striking resemblance. This way of loudly proclaiming one’s ‘demands’ complies well with the Belgian character. Still little adapted to going in the great world, one will go sit at the table of the Diplomatic Conferences showing that one has a good appetite.”¹⁰⁰² Also this time, Van den Steen’s prophecies would materialize. However, by the time they did, cosmopolitan aristocratic diplomats who prided themselves to transcend sentiments of petty nationalism had long been pushed aside by the allegedly typical Belgians that he looked down upon.

⁹⁹⁷ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 1 and 14 January 1916.

⁹⁹⁸ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 417.

⁹⁹⁹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 16 April 1915.

¹⁰⁰⁰ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 29 June, 4 July, and 13 August 1915.

¹⁰⁰¹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 21 June 1915.

¹⁰⁰² ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 2 March 1916.

§ 2. The Stings of the Hornets

The Declaration of Sainte-Adresse

Despite facing serious domestic pressure, in late December 1915 Beyens managed to convince the Cabinet that a formal declaration from the Allies to include Belgium in any future peace conference suited the country's needs far better. Unlike an alliance, it did not bind the fate of the Belgian army to those of France and Great Britain and allowed Belgium to reap the benefits of its martyrdom in international public opinion.¹⁰⁰³ The idea of an Allied declaration apparently originated out of discussions held earlier in December between Beyens and Jules Cambon, Secretary-General of the French Foreign Ministry. Cambon had become a close friend of Beyens during their missions in Berlin before the war.¹⁰⁰⁴ The Allied declaration project responded perfectly to how Beyens saw the future of Belgian foreign policy. Nonetheless, Renkin and his fellow annexationists felt they had obtained a victory. "Beyens is on the turn," Renkin would have exclaimed to Bassompierre, who patted the Colonial Minister on the back for his achievement.¹⁰⁰⁵ Clearly, Renkin and Bassompierre had difficulties acknowledging that Beyens wished to continue to uphold Belgian neutrality for the duration but at the same time held a less rigid conception of neutrality than they believed.

In the meantime, King Albert had not abandoned his plan to have a government of national union formed. After several conversations in the summer of 1915, the King had assured himself that Hymans's reluctance towards territorial expansion at the expense of the Netherlands accorded with his own views.¹⁰⁰⁶ In November 1915, he invited the Socialist Minister of State Vandervelde to De Panne. During their conversation, Albert not only declared himself against an alliance with Great Britain and France, but also spoke of the conciliatory role that international socialism could play at the future peace conference. Given that Vandervelde was President of the Socialist International, the King's words might have sounded like he wished to see Vandervelde as one of Belgium's representatives at that occasion. Appealing yet another time directly to the Socialist leader's sensitivities, Albert concluded the audience by denouncing the "imperialist tendencies" in the Belgian press in Le Havre. Vandervelde concurred, labelling these tendencies as "ridiculous".¹⁰⁰⁷ If Hymans and

¹⁰⁰³ PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 232-233 and 262-263.

¹⁰⁰⁴ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 284.

¹⁰⁰⁵ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 30 December 1915.

¹⁰⁰⁶ THIELEMANS, "Les *Carnets de guerre*", 202-203 and 212

¹⁰⁰⁷ THIELEMANS, "Les *Carnets de guerre*", 232. On Vandervelde's relation with the King during the war, see also POLASKY, Janet, *The Democratic Socialism of Emile Vandervelde : Between Reform and Revolution*, Oxford, 1995, 113-136.

Vandervelde were to become members of the government, this would strengthen the anti-annexationist position in the Council of Ministers. Together with the third Minister of State from the opposition, the Liberal Count Goblet d'Alviella, who opposed annexationism primarily because the claimed territories nearly all harboured Catholic populations, they would support the views of the King and Beyens.

Remarkably enough, the proposition to include Hymans, Goblet, and Vandervelde in the government came from Broqueville, whose lip service to the King's wishes concealed very different intentions. Apparently, Fernand Neuray had already persuaded the Cabinet Chief to broaden the government by late October 1915. Given Neuray's annexationist views, this is quite remarkable. Yet there is a double explanation. On the one hand, Neuray's nationalist turn had convinced him that the Belgian people had to overcome ideological cleavages and unite against their common enemies. Already in late 1914, he had declared that *Le XXe siècle* would become a truly "national" newspaper that rigorously respected the political truce and would show no mercy for those threatening the country's unity. This conviction also led him to hire several journalists and publicists of different political denominations who shared his territorial aspirations. In addition to long-time nationalists such as Dumont-Wilden and Des Ombiaux, these also included the former political journalist of *Le Soir* Edmond Patris.¹⁰⁰⁸ The Liberals among them might have persuaded Neuray that their party leader Hymans, who was as yet opposed to formulating territorial claims, would eventually come round. On the other hand, the editor of the *XXe Siècle* identified as the fiercest opponents of annexationism (at the expense of the Netherlands) within the government not only Beyens but also the Flemish Ministers Aloys Van de Vyvere, Joris Helleputte and Prosper Poulet. These men all rejected the idea of incorporating Dutch territories for fear of troubling relations with the country that had received so many Flemish refugees. Their anti-annexationist stance led Neuray to identify them as supporters of the Flemish movement, and thus as enemies of the Belgian nation.¹⁰⁰⁹ Although Helleputte continued to resist, Broqueville did manage to push through the creation of Belgium's first coalition government on 18 January 1916.¹⁰¹⁰ Neuray and Broqueville thus got what they wanted. However, in the short run for both, and – as will be seen – in the long run for the latter, this did not really suit their ends.

¹⁰⁰⁸ DEFOORT, "L'Action française", 116-117; DELHEZ, "Fernand Neuray", 69.

¹⁰⁰⁹ DEFOORT, "L'Action française", 131-132.

¹⁰¹⁰ SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 35-41; THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916", 643-644.

In early January 1916, the King reported in his diaries that Beyens had complained to him about annexationist machinations from within the government and his own Department. At this occasion, Beyens had also confided to the King that he did not believe the new composition of the government would succeed. The Foreign Minister attributed the expected failure to the decision of Hymans to stay in London. A year earlier, the Liberal leader and Beyens had started an almost weekly epistolary conversation. Not long after Hymans had accepted to lead the London legation but more than a month before Neuray launched *Le XXe Siècle*'s annexationist campaign, he pointed out to Beyens that a lot of difficulties would be caused by "the illusionists who would want to drag us towards a policy of conquest." Even "supposing that we would have to claim vast annexations, Hymans continued, "one would have to understand that the first condition to realize our wishes would be not to talk about them."¹⁰¹¹ While Hymans might have added the latter part of these statements to implicitly demonstrate to Beyens that he understood the subtleties of diplomacy, the then future Foreign Minister will have certainly directed most of his attention towards the first part. Like with later, similar messages that he was to receive from Hymans, Beyens certainly concurred with their contents.¹⁰¹²

The refusal of Hymans to actively join the government might have only increased Beyens's feeling that his position in the government was under attack. Yet a few strokes of fortune came his way. First, Davignon was eventually persuaded to officially resign, so that Beyens finally became Foreign Minister in his own right.¹⁰¹³ Second, Beyens found an objective ally in the Socialist Vandervelde, who as new member of the government fiercely opposed annexationist policies during the first Council meeting of the new government at the end of January 1916. Third, at the same occasion and under the presidency of the King, the ministers more or less agreed upon Belgian war aims as Beyens had formulated them. Sticking closely to the King's neutralist policy but providing some opening towards the annexationists as well, Beyens had worked out a compromise which stated that no separate peace would be concluded with Germany, that Belgium would be restored to full political, economic and financial independence and could hold on to its full sovereignty over the Congo, and that it would be desirable that Luxemburg returned to Belgium. As to the latter

¹⁰¹¹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 23, Paul Hymans to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 7 February 1915.

¹⁰¹² See especially AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 23, Paul Hymans to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 28 July and 26 October 1915.

¹⁰¹³ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 285 and 1073.

aim, Beyens stressed that no predictions about its materialization could at present be made. It entirely depended upon the circumstances at the time of the peace conference.¹⁰¹⁴

Seemingly, tensions within the government had calmed down when the representatives of France, Great Britain, and Russia came to Beyens's office in the *Villa Hollandaise* and formally uttered the Declaration of Sainte-Adresse. They stated that their countries would invite the Belgian government to the future peace conference, and would not end hostilities before Belgium had been restored to full independence and repaired for its war damages. Beyens replied that Belgium thanked its loyal guarantors and would continue to fight with them "until the triumph of justice."¹⁰¹⁵

Immediately afterwards, however, it became clear that tensions had not quite simmered. During the negotiations that had led to the allied declaration, Beyens had asked the governments of France and Great Britain to declare that Belgium would be invited to the peace conference, so that the country could "assert, with the support of the powers, the just claims that it will have to formulate." By means of the insertion of the 'just claims' passage, the Foreign Minister hoped to accommodate the annexationists in the government without actually giving in to their demands. However, France and Great Britain perfectly grasped the meaning of these words, and refused to allow them into the eventual declaration. Joint efforts by Beyens and Hymans at the reunion of the Council of Ministers at the end of January managed to overcome opposition from notably Renkin, Broqueville, Carton, and Segers. After all, Beyens would argue a few days later, the omission of the passage did not imply that France and Great Britain would oppose Belgium's 'just claims'.¹⁰¹⁶

The annexationist Ministers had certainly not wholeheartedly accepted the revisions. Moreover, after the Declaration of Sainte-Adresse had been stated, Renkin had to justify to his annexationist friends why he had let Beyens have his way. The triumvirate of the young ones came into action. Haag, who read Nothomb's diaries, describes how during secret nocturnal reunions held at Bassompierre's residence, the host collaborated with Orts and Nothomb to influence the members of the government whom they hoped would support their ideas. While Orts failed to rally his fellow Liberal Hymans to their cause, Carton feigned car trouble as an excuse not to have to attend the meetings. According to Haag, his collision with

¹⁰¹⁴ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 378-384; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 286; PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 233; THIELEMANS, "Les Carnets de guerre", 245.

¹⁰¹⁵ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 287; PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 233.

¹⁰¹⁶ BEYENS, *Un diplomate belge*, 64-65; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 285.

the King had indeed rendered him more cautious. Haag adds that in addition to Renkin, only Segers was held to be an unconditional supporter of Belgian annexationism.¹⁰¹⁷

At this time, the annexationists certainly counted Broqueville as one of them. We know that Haag did everything he could to deny the Cabinet Chief's annexationist machinations. We also know that the sources that he ignored prove the contrary. Admittedly, Haag could not have consulted Bassompierre's diaries, for these were withheld for decades by Jean Vanwelkenhuyzen, the first Director of the CEGESOMA, and only discovered sometime after the latter's death in 2008.¹⁰¹⁸ From these diaries, it becomes apparent that at least in Renkin's own perception, he was working together with Broqueville to persuade the King and other members of the government to accept the annexationist point of view. According to Bassompierre, Renkin reported to him in early January 1916 that "the two of them [Renkin and Broqueville] have sworn to rally him [King Albert] to their ideas and to topple their recalcitrant colleagues." A few weeks later, when the extension of the government was about to materialize, Bassompierre expressed his fear to Renkin that Vandervelde would oppose territorial acquisitions. The Colonial Minister is reported to have responded "Don't fear ... Broqueville and I will make sure of him."¹⁰¹⁹ Since the war had led several Socialists to spontaneously turn into annexationists, Renkin might have figured, some persuasion from Broqueville and himself would certainly do the trick with Vandervelde.

Of course, Baron Beyens constituted a greater obstacle on the road towards an openly annexationist foreign policy. Given that Broqueville preferred to operate behind the scenes, Bassompierre, Orts, and Nothomb decided that Renkin would have to lead the attack against Beyens. Haag deduced from Nothomb's diaries that the trio first reproached the Colonial Minister for the cowardice he had exhibited at the previous Council meeting, but then embraced and flattered him, and finally roused him against Beyens and Van der Elst.¹⁰²⁰

Also Bassompierre's diaries reveal how the minds of the young annexationists evolved in the weeks before and after the Allied Declaration. Also Bassompierre portrayed Renkin as a mere executer of the schemes that he puzzled out together with Orts, Guillaume, and

¹⁰¹⁷ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 417.

¹⁰¹⁸ The archival provenance of these diaries is not entirely clear. At one point, they did make part of the documents that Jean Vanwelkenhuyzen had withheld from the CEGESOMA (English: Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society) and deposited in the archives of the residence of the then former Belgian King Leopold III, probably somewhere in the 1970s. A few years ago, most of the archives held in that residence went to the archives of the Royal Palace, after which the archivist returned them to the CEGESOMA. The CEGESOMA made them accessible to the public in 2010. See MARTIN, Dirk, "Recente archiefaanwinsten van het CEGES-SOMA in 2010", *Mededelingenblad van de Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 32/2, 2010, 16.

¹⁰¹⁹ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 6 and 16 January 1918.

¹⁰²⁰ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 417.

Nothomb. His diaries show how the hostility towards the leading executives of Belgian foreign policy grew sharper as the day of the declaration drew near. While having afternoon tea on 10 February 1915, Bassompierre and Guillaume decided to do what it takes “to get rid of 2 heads.” Two days later, Bassompierre exclaimed to Orts that “they must be removed.” At the day of the Declaration, the disappointment that its contents had evoked in Bassompierre only grew when he realized that Gaiffier, his direct superior, did not even wish to read the notes that he drafted anymore. Getting “seriously excited”, Bassompierre told Gaiffier that “if he does not see the treason that is being plotted against Belgium under the appearance of a new policy of moderation towards Germany, he is blind.” Beyens was responsible for preventing him to express his opinions the normal way, Bassompierre reasoned, and this meant that he could manifest his thoughts to other members of the Cabinet. He felt “certain that some of the cabinet must understand what devilish designs lurk under the idea, put forward by Beyens.” During lunch with Renkin, Orts, Guillaume, and Nothomb the day after he identified Beyens as the devil, Bassompierre and his commensals agreed that Van der Elst was the next worst thing: “a germanophile”. The following day, Bassompierre and Orts met up with Nothomb, who claimed to know that Jungbluth and Ingenbleek had contacted Renkin “in order to devise a means of getting rid of Bey & vd Elst!!!!” Bassompierre received further incentives to action when Orts told him the same day that even Hymans had called Van der Elst “a Boche who ought never to have been left at the head of the ministry.” Bassompierre immediately started drafting a note that he revised the next days with the help of Nothomb and Orts. Their goal apparently was to provide Renkin with ammunition to attack Beyens, but without estranging Hymans. The very day of the next reunion of the Council of Ministers, the annexationist triumvirate received nothing but favourable signs. Bassompierre could confide to his diary that Van der Elst suddenly seemed “desirous to make great friends with me”, that Guillaume informed him that Belgian public opinion in Paris was on their side, and that he heard the King’s private secretary speaking “strongly against Beyens & Elst.” Yet the last comment Bassompierre wrote on 24 February 1916, was “Fiasco – Renkin’s speech followed by minister’s note.”¹⁰²¹ What had happened?

It seems that the neutralist spy network had done a good job, and had informed Beyens of what he could expect. Unsuspectingly, Renkin started attacking Beyens, attributing the responsibility for the omission of the “just claims” passage to the Foreign Minister’s gingerly policy and declaring before his colleagues that Beyens was *persona non grata* at the *Quai*

¹⁰²¹ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 10-12 and 18-24 February 1916.

d'Orsay. Instead of responding to Renkin's allegations, Beyens stated that his good friend Jules Cambon had advised him not to speak of territorial expansion, for it would elicit similar French claims on Belgian soil. Cambon had pointed to a number of towns in southern Belgium that France had ceded after the defeat of Napoléon in 1815. In front of the other ministers, who had started to believe in rumours spread by the annexationists that the Belgian Foreign Minister was indeed very disliked at the French Foreign Office, Beyens had proved otherwise by demonstrating his connection with the French Secretary-General. Moreover, this connection seems to have safeguarded Belgium from losing territory to France. Renkin had no answer ready. Like a month earlier, he would have to undergo the rebukes of the younger annexationists.¹⁰²²

Bassompierre indeed acknowledged that Renkin "was properly hoodwinked by Beyens", and that consequently "all fight is over." With some sense of despair, he confided to his diaries that he would go to London and find a job there. Looking back on his professional activities since the outbreak of war, he had to find that the "strong policy" that he had fought for, based on the abandonment of neutrality and confidence in the Allied Powers, had been ignored by his superiors. Then, Bassompierre continued, Beyens had come and had made everything even worse. The new Foreign Minister had installed "a regime that was contrary to the wishes of the country." Moreover, Bassompierre concluded, "the way Mr. Baron Beyens understands the attributions of the Political Direction renders me completely useless."¹⁰²³ Bassompierre thus represented Beyens as some kind of autocrat. He felt that the Foreign Minister did not allow the employees of the Department to have a say in the formulation of foreign policy, but also judged that Beyens's decisions ran against the Belgian people's will.

While Bassompierre could invoke personal experience to support the former opinion, his evaluation of the latter one is more problematic. The great majority of the Belgians still lived in Belgium, and had hardly been given an opportunity to state their wishes.¹⁰²⁴ Admittedly, a survey about annexationism and neutrality had been conducted in political and economic milieus in occupied Belgium. Already in April and May 1915, the Foreign Ministry's former Commercial Director Léon Capelle had been able to send the results of this survey to Le Havre. The message was very clear: prominent personalities from Belgian politics and commerce categorically opposed any incorporation of German territory and agreed that the friendship with the Netherlands could absolutely not be jeopardized. Capelle

¹⁰²² HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 418; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 288; AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 26 February 1916.

¹⁰²³ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 25 February 1916.

¹⁰²⁴ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 295.

also pointed out that incorporation of other lands rested on the approval of the people living on those lands. Not even mentioning Limburg, Capelle suggested that the Dutch people in Zeeland Flanders would never accept the Belgian nationality. Bassompierre was very familiar with the results of this survey. Over the next months and years, he would join Carton, Segers and other annexationists in efforts to make inquiries with ever larger sections of the political and economic personalities in occupied Belgium. Yet the message remained the same. Disappointed with these results, Bassompierre would argue in a note to Beyens that the people in Belgium could not fully grasp what was at stake. They only desired the return to the pre-war situation and tended to lose sight of the country's "higher interests". The government and the press would be able to remedy this state of mind and have the Belgian people perceive their interests more clearly, Bassompierre believed.¹⁰²⁵

Keeping this in mind, the fact that in the wake of the Declaration of Sainte-Adresse Bassompierre portrayed Beyens as undemocratic should also be seen as a result of his interactions with the ideas of the Christian Democrats Renkin and Carton de Wiart, and of the annexationist publicists in Le Havre. They seem to have justified their actions invoking arguments of democracy and considered a foreign policy aimed at enlarging the country as the truly democratic foreign policy. As such, those who opposed this line of thought were the nation's enemies, and had to be fought.

The Two Policies

More than Beyens, however, the Belgian King was the actual autocratic leader of Belgian diplomacy and the incarnation of a neutralist foreign policy. Like princes did in early modern times, Albert conducted a personal foreign policy, named his confidants at key positions, and sent his favourites, like the sociologist Waxweiler, on secret diplomatic missions that no Belgian outside of the royal entourage knew about.¹⁰²⁶ However, because the nationalist ideology of Belgian annexationists counted royalism as one of its fundamental characteristics, Bassompierre had a lot of difficulties blaming the King for what went wrong. His diary entries in the week after the Declaration of Sainte-Adresse portray Albert as completely under the influence of persons who went against the country's wishes. Bassompierre did not mean

¹⁰²⁵ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 466-467.

¹⁰²⁶ For examples of how this kind of diplomacy worked in early modern times, see the essays in VON THIESSEN, Hillard, and Christian WINDLER (eds.), *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen. Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel*, Cologne, 2010. See also my "Pieter Paul Rubens als diplomatiek debutant. Het verhaal van een ambitieus politiek agent in de vroege zeventiende eeuw", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 123/1, 2010, 20-33; and my "The Gift of Rubens. Rethinking the Concept of Gift-Giving in Early Modern Diplomacy", *European History Quarterly*, 43/3, 2013, 421-441.

men like Ingenbleek and Jungbluth, whom he still believed to be on the side of the annexationists, but rather Beyens and Van der Elst. He predicted that “we go to a revolution if the King’s bad advisors are not removed and His Majesty enlightened.”¹⁰²⁷

Most other members of the circle of nationalists experienced less mental struggles with attacking not only Beyens, but also the King. In early January 1916, the industrialist Gaston Barbanson, concluded a letter to Broqueville stating that “this influence of Beyens on the King really threatens to become disastrous.” To this Barbanson immediately added: “Do you know how they call our illustrious Sire in the army? ‘The great constipated’. That is spot-on.”¹⁰²⁸ Given that around this time Broqueville entrusted Barbanson (and Nothomb) with the task of conducting propaganda campaigns in favour of the “return” of the Luxembourgers to the Belgian nation, it seems that such statements did not particularly offend the Cabinet Chief, especially since they were not proclaimed in public.¹⁰²⁹

Fernand Neuray decided to tread on much thinner ice. In a series of articles, the editor of *Le XXe siècle* heavily criticized the King for his neutralist policy and even suggested that Albert was a germanophile.¹⁰³⁰ Judging from his reaction, it seems that the King did not believe in the independence of opinion of Neuray’s newspaper. He felt that Broqueville directed the entire press campaign against him and against the policy that he stood for. Albert represented the Cabinet Chief in the same way as Bassompierre portrayed Beyens, that is as an autocrat. “This man might allow the existence of the monarchy,” he wrote about Broqueville, “but only under his absolute dictatorship.”¹⁰³¹ The King was also convinced that Broqueville did not operate alone, but received support from other ministers who, imbued with “nationalist exaggerations”, encouraged the journalists of *Le XXe siècle*. Explicitly referring to Carton de Wiart, Renkin, and Segers, Albert wrote in his diaries that “these politicians think they serve their own glory by affecting an exorbitant and aggressive patriotism that tallies with the care they take to keep themselves far away from all danger.” Judging from these comments, patriotism for the King meant defending one’s country rather than scheming to expand it. Because “the monarchy is in their way,” Albert continued, “they try to spread disadvantageous interpretations of the actions of the monarch.” Yet “these pygmies”, as Albert called them, should not triumph too soon, for “their chastisement will

¹⁰²⁷ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 25 February 1916. See also in the same diary, the entry of 4 March 1916: the “King who is rather undecided naturally & hears always the same bell.”

¹⁰²⁸ ARA, T 029, “Papiers de Charles de Broqueville”, n° 43, Gaston Barbanson to Charles de Broqueville, 2 January 1916.

¹⁰²⁹ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 299-300.

¹⁰³⁰ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 288.

¹⁰³¹ THIELEMANS, “Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916”, 654-655.

come.” The King indeed predicted that “the Belgians of the invaded country will judge them and woe betide them, if after having exclaimed the most extravagant promises, they come home empty-handed.”¹⁰³²

Like his annexationist adversaries, Albert invoked the people’s will to legitimate his actions. According to the King, popular sentiments desired both a neutralist foreign policy and the continuing existence of the monarchy. Consequently, his enemies were the people’s enemies. The King’s sympathy for these men did not increase when Broqueville came to talk to him about “the two policies.” Executing the policy of the King, the Cabinet Chief argued, Beyens had passed over the opportunity to demand from France and England economic advantages and territorial expansions. According to Albert, Broqueville labelled Beyens’s behaviour as “a culpable lack of patriotism”, and urged the King to turn to the policy of the government, which was directed towards rapprochement with the Allied Powers. Albert replied that such policy directly sprung from “the breakthrough of nationalism that has seized our political world”, and was no more than a “manifestation of certain politicians’ impatient ambitions and of the exorbitant ideas of minds that are muddled by the events.”¹⁰³³ In his conversations with the King, Broqueville certainly tried to set himself up as a mediator between both policies. Nevertheless, for the time being Albert continued to regard him as one of the most prominent annexationists.¹⁰³⁴

Moreover, and despite the fact that Broqueville coveted them, the functions of mediator between King and government in terms of foreign policy were already occupied, namely by Baron Beyens. Jan Velaers suggests that Albert blamed Beyens for the Declaration of Sainte-Adresse, which he found unsatisfactory.¹⁰³⁵ Yet this did not change the fact that he still considered Beyens the right man in the right place. The King indeed found the declaration “weak”, but attributed its shortcomings primarily to the opposition of the annexationists in the government towards his policy. Albert singled out the government’s insistence on the insertion of the ‘just claims’ passage, which he knew the Allies would never accept, as the main reason for the failure of the declaration.¹⁰³⁶ The King also knew perfectly well that his Foreign Minister not only shared his opinions on Belgian annexationists, but also

¹⁰³² THIELEMANS, “*Les Carnets de guerre*”, 256-257.

¹⁰³³ THIELEMANS, “*Les Carnets de guerre*”, 257-258.

¹⁰³⁴ See PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 234. Haag tries to minimize the differences between Broqueville and the King, see HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 426-432. See also VELAERS, *Albert I*, 295.

¹⁰³⁵ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 287-288.

¹⁰³⁶ Cfr. THIELEMANS, “*Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916*”, 655. This letter from Albert to Jules Ingenbleek, written on 18 February 1916, states: “The Declaration is weak. It does not mention the integrity of the country and its possessions, like I had so insisted that one would ask. But one wished the term ‘just claims’, one ran into a refusal.”

on the more profound sources that nourished the desire of some of them, namely personal ambitions. Tellingly, Beyens confided to his wife that the best way to avoid conflicts with his fellow ministers was to convince them of his own “lack of ambition.”¹⁰³⁷ In a particularly cordial letter written the day after the Declaration, Albert asked Beyens to come and see him in order to talk about the King’s recent encounters with foreign and domestic personalities. To stress their communality of views, Albert noted that a newspaper article published by Bassompierre made him aware that “the misfortune of the times and our country in particular is that everyone wants to speak and act in the name of the nation.” It was not without danger, Albert continued, “that many of our compatriots have an immoderate thirst for glory, to which they would sacrifice everything.”¹⁰³⁸

The King’s implicit endorsement of his actions must have pleased Beyens. The Foreign Minister indeed felt quite isolated. At the day of the declaration, Beyens had to take full responsibility for the event, because all but two of his colleagues were present in Le Havre.¹⁰³⁹ The symbolic character of the other ministers’ absence will certainly not have gone unnoticed. Moreover, just before reading the King’s letter, Beyens had confided to his wife that “my declaration has received anything but the approval of all my compatriots in Le Havre, the small nationalist clan would have wanted something completely different.”¹⁰⁴⁰ Perhaps Albert’s support gave Beyens the strength to hold on to his office after the Cabinet meeting in late February. Realizing that not one of his colleagues defended him against the allegations of Renkin at that reunion, Beyens did offer his resignation. Yet he ultimately decided to keep going after conversations with Broqueville. Haag rightly attributes the hostilities towards Beyens to the fact that the members of the government considered him as an intruder, as the King’s man sent among them to execute the King’s policy.¹⁰⁴¹ However, Haag also minimizes the role that Broqueville played in the process of toppling Beyens. Despite the damages to his honour that the King had inflicted upon him by appointing a diplomat to head the Foreign Ministry, Haag argues, the generous man that Broqueville was always stayed loyal towards Beyens and, albeit “not more than softly”, always supported him.¹⁰⁴² Unlike Haag, who might not have wanted to, Beyens did see through the game that

¹⁰³⁷ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 4 December 1915.

¹⁰³⁸ THIELEMANS, “Lettres du Roi Albert 1882-1916”, 653.

¹⁰³⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 14 February 1916.

¹⁰⁴⁰ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 18 February 1916.

¹⁰⁴¹ This is also the opinion of Beyens’s son. See BEYENS, *Un diplomate belge*, 29-35.

¹⁰⁴² HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 420.

Broqueville was playing. He told Broqueville that he did not wish to be “a cause of weakness” to the King and the government, and suggested that Broqueville and Albert would examine the possibility of confiding the direction of the Foreign Ministry to “a less prudent man, who is determined to do justice to the claims that are expressed around us, if necessary by falling flat on his face and taking the harsh rebuffs of the Allied Powers.” While Beyens also wanted to suggest that a policy of territorial annexations could not but fail, Broqueville reacted to the other message of these statements, namely the appeal to unveil his personal ambitions. Explaining why he did not take Beyens’s defence, the Cabinet Chief denied these ambitions and stated instead that it was all “the fault of the King”, who had undermined his authority over his colleagues and thus made any intervention in favour of Beyens pointless.¹⁰⁴³

§ 3. The Fall from the King’s Grace

Broqueville’s attempt to play Beyens off against the King did not succeed. Six weeks earlier, amidst growing criticisms from government and press circles in Le Havre against the King’s policies, Beyens’s sentiments of loyalty to his sovereign had even incited him to tell Albert that if a scapegoat was required, he would take the fall.¹⁰⁴⁴ His offered resignation at the end of February 1916 might have partly been inspired by his desire to honour this promise. That Beyens eventually stayed on would not make things easier for him. Michael Palo has rightly pointed out the irony and tragedy of the fact that “the man whom the annexationists most clearly identified as a neutralist was the same man that King Albert would eventually come to regard as insufficiently protective of Belgium’s interests vis-à-vis the Allies.”¹⁰⁴⁵ Three main events contributed to Beyens’s fall from the King’s grace.

Humouring the Germans

The first was a speech in the *Reichstag* by the German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg in April 1916. Bethman-Hollweg had declared that Belgium could only conclude peace with Germany if the country renounced its vassalage to France and Great Britain and stopped Romanising the Flemish people.¹⁰⁴⁶ While Beyens shared the government’s

¹⁰⁴³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 26 February 1916.

¹⁰⁴⁴ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 10 January 1916. Bassompierre got this information from Baron de Gaiffier, but surely had his reasons to doubt its veracity.

¹⁰⁴⁵ PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 234.

¹⁰⁴⁶ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 300.

repugnance of these words and agreed that they required an answer, he found it difficult to keep his colleagues from demanding a too harshly stated reply that would moreover contain the territorial claims insisted on by, in Beyens's words, "a certain number of fowls". The Foreign Minister was indeed well aware that such an answer would not only irritate the Allies but would also have negative repercussions for the Belgians who had remained in the country.¹⁰⁴⁷ Searching for a middle way, he drafted a note that pointed to Germany as the culprit of the war. The German army killed innocent people, burnt cities, and starved the population, Beyens wrote, adding that Belgium had never been a vassal of any country and did not wish to become one of Germany. This note, which would be sent to Belgium's diplomats and to the international press, received the approbation of the Council of Ministers.¹⁰⁴⁸ The King, however, called it "a string of trivial ferocities and insults to Germany," and opposed its dissemination. During a royal audience granted to him a few weeks later, Beyens retorted asking "So you want to humour Germany?" Albert replied that this was exactly what he wanted. The King indeed feared that accusations towards Germany would lead the German army to push harder to take the remaining patch of unoccupied Belgian soil. The Foreign Minister could not but tone down the sharpness of the note.¹⁰⁴⁹ It came as no surprise to Beyens that he encountered opposition towards the new draft at the next reunion of the Cabinet. Remarkably, however, criticisms came primarily from Broqueville, who managed to prevent the Foreign Minister from issuing the note.¹⁰⁵⁰ It so happened that this was exactly what Albert wanted.

Broqueville's unsuccessful attempt to play Beyens off against the King was indeed followed by efforts to play the King off against Beyens. The Cabinet Chief had initiated his charm offensive with Albert almost immediately upon speaking with the sovereign about the two policies, that is about a week after he had attributed the attacks against Beyens after the Allied Declaration to the fault of the King. Already in early March 1916, he seems to have convinced Albert that Renkin, and not he, represented the opinions of the annexationists in the government.¹⁰⁵¹ When Beyens had presented his reply to Bethmann-Hollweg to the Council of Ministers, Broqueville proposed to submit it to the King. He told Albert that he did not approve of it. The King was happy to note that "Broqueville and I seem to agree well." Beyens certainly saw what the Cabinet Chief's game was, and appears to have complained to

¹⁰⁴⁷ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 12 April 1916.

¹⁰⁴⁸ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 300-301.

¹⁰⁴⁹ THIELEMANS, "Les *Carnets* de guerre", 262-264.

¹⁰⁵⁰ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 301.

¹⁰⁵¹ THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1916-1918", 345.

the King that Broqueville was “a great liar.” Albert, however, merely recorded that there were things that he did not agree with Beyens about. The King also felt that Beyens “was wrong not to have talked with Broqueville first, before the reunion of the Council of Ministers.”¹⁰⁵²

A remarkable shift in the King’s attitude towards both Beyens and Broqueville seems to have taken place. Albert now seemed to feel that Broqueville represented his opinion more faithfully than the man whom he had put at the head of the Foreign Ministry but who in that capacity had drafted a reply to the German government that he would not accept. “That one has it printed in *Le XXe siècle*,” the King even noted.¹⁰⁵³ The ‘one’ referred to Beyens, of course, whom Albert rashly associated with the annexationists.

Given the way in which Beyens was depicted in the press around this time, the King’s comment must have struck him particularly hard. After the Declaration of Sainte-Adresse had become public, Neuray had started using his editorials and other articles in *Le XXe siècle* to subtly malign the Foreign Minister. Initially, Neuray limited himself to extensively commenting on the portrayal of Beyens in the German press. For weeks, German allegations of Beyens calling Belgian refugees in France profiteers who refused the work that was offered to them, and German glorifications as would the Foreign Minister have been convinced that the Allies, and not Germany, would have wanted and started the war, figured prominently in the columns of *Le XXe siècle*. Neuray certainly had these German press practices condemned, but the readers of his newspaper were nonetheless confronted with an image of the Belgian Foreign Minister that most likely they would otherwise not have come across.¹⁰⁵⁴

In an editorial published a few weeks later, Neuray continued to condemn the “perfidious campaign” of the German press and chose to provide his readers with some examples. However, he interpreted these translated quotations in an insinuating manner. The editor of *Le XXe siècle* started from the example of the *Kölnische Zeitung* of 19 February 1916. In this edition of the German daily, the Declaration of Sainte-Adresse was labelled “a great success of Baron Beyens, who in this way obtains from the little reliable Allies the commitment of a complete restoration and indemnification of Belgium, [...] and preserves Belgium’s freedom of action in case the Allies would find themselves in the impossibility to keep their promise.” Neuray argued that “obviously, the rag of Cologne wants to make our Foreign Minister pass for a kind of mistrustful and sly miniature Machiavelli who thinks of

¹⁰⁵² THIELEMANS, “*Les Carnets de guerre*”, 262-265.

¹⁰⁵³ THIELEMANS, “*Lettres du Roi Albert 1916-1918*”, 350.

¹⁰⁵⁴ See for instance ANONYMOUS, “Echos. un nouvel exemple de la mauvaise foi de la presse allemande”, *Le XXe siècle*, 22 February 1916; and ANONYMOUS, “L’Allemagne et la déclaration des Puissances. Les premiers commentaires de la presse allemande”, *Le XXe siècle*, 23 February 1916.

nothing less than deceiving our Allies and secretly negotiating, when the opportunity arises, with the German empire.” Again, Neuray confronted his readers with a very negative image of Beyens, which due to its emphasis on deceit and secretiveness moreover appealed to existing prejudices of contemporary diplomats. Also in Paris, Neuray continued, “Germany” had succeeded in spreading rumours that Beyens was “inexorably hostile towards the abandonment of Belgian neutrality.” Neuray asserted that these rumours “worry and demoralize” the Belgians in Paris. The director of *Le XXe siècle* reassured his readers that they did not need to worry. Of course, he explained, “we do not know more than anyone else about what has happened at the last Cabinet meetings where Belgian neutrality has been discussed.” Yet, Neuray claimed to know, “in private conversations our ministers have always pronounced themselves, frankly and with energy, for its total abandonment.” As such, Neuray argued, “how to imagine that Mr Baron Beyens would be a man who would pursue a policy in Paris that differs from the one of the government to which he belongs?” Neuray concluded that these rumours had to be “legends spread with the only purpose of dividing the Belgians and damaging a minister of whom the country has the right to expect, in the present and in the future, the most precious services.”¹⁰⁵⁵

Neuray’s editorial reveals different aspects of the changing attitude towards Beyens in the annexationist press. First, praises of the Foreign Minister’s qualities as a diplomat or as a patriot no longer appeared in *Le XXe siècle*. Surely, Neuray condemned the German press representation of Beyens, but he did not include statements that the Foreign Minister was a talented and staunch defender of the interests of a country that he loved dearly. One admirer of *L’Allemagne avant la guerre* had to experience that while his articles had always been published in *Le XXe siècle*, Neuray rejected his study of Beyens’s book despite the proof of German war guilt that it contained.¹⁰⁵⁶

Second, instead of publishing eulogies of Beyens’s publications, the director of *Le XXe siècle* incited the Foreign Minister to give proof of his patriotism by executing the policy that the annexationists advocated. Three days earlier, Neuray had published one of Mémor’s letters containing a similar message. Presumably from the trenches, this alleged soldier urged Beyens to pursue the materialization of the “Great Idea of our fathers” formulated by the “thinker and patriot Banning.” The Foreign Minister, Mémor stated, was “responsible for the

¹⁰⁵⁵ NEURAY, Fernand, “Une manoeuvre à dénoncer”, *Le XXe siècle*, 5 March 1916.

¹⁰⁵⁶ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 52, Firmin Van den Bossch to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 17 May 1916. Van den Bosch, then in Egypt, had sent his study of *L’Allemagne avant la guerre* “several months” before to *Le XXe siècle*. Afterwards, he sent it to *La nouvelle Belgique*, an annexationist weekly founded by Louis Dumont-Wilden, but they did not want it either. On *La nouvelle Belgique*, see LEROY, *La presse belge*, 11.

realization of the hopes for which the purest and most generous blood has abundantly flown, [that is a] loyal and strong Belgium.”¹⁰⁵⁷ Of course, this loyal and strong Belgium was a country that comprised a far larger territory.

Third, Neuray knew perfectly well that Beyens opposed the abandonment of neutrality and wished to replace it only after the war. However, feigning his ignorance of the Foreign Minister’s views on Belgian foreign policy allowed Neuray to set a trap that Beyens was bound to fall into. By pointing out that the preservation of neutrality was exactly what “Germany” wanted, Neuray labelled persons who favoured such policy (for whatever reasons) as germanophile and thus unpatriotic. By arguing that the entire government favoured an alliance with the Allies, he called the actions of such persons illegitimate because they did not respect the wishes of the Belgian government. By stressing that the preservation of neutrality caused common Belgians to worry and lose their morale, Neuray branded such policy as undemocratic in the sense that it did not represent the Belgian people’s views and interests.

In an editorial published a week later, Neuray further elaborated the picture of Beyens as a germanophile. On 11 March 1916, the Foreign Minister had held a lecture at the Sorbonne university in Paris.¹⁰⁵⁸ In letters to his wife, Beyens wrote that he really did not feel like speaking in public but had to because Pierre Nothomb had fiercely attacked his policy and had described him as a very timid and hesitating man during various lectures held in salons in Rome, where Carton de Wiart had sent him. Because Nothomb was about to do the same in France, Beyens felt he could not but accept the invitation at the Sorbonne. He argued that “my refusal would be interpreted as acknowledging the sentiments one unjustly ascribes to me.”¹⁰⁵⁹ However, holding a public lecture would expose Beyens to the critical ears of Neuray and his collaborators. Elaborating upon the issue of war guilt at the Sorbonne, Beyens declared that “it would be wrong to attribute to the German proletarians the frightful sentiments typical of the caste of nobles, officers, intellectuals, etc.” These statements certainly gained Beyens a lot of credit in the eyes of the internationalist Socialist Vandervelde, who conveyed a similar message during his own lecture at the Sorbonne that day. In Neuray, however, they only evoked resentment. The director of *Le XXe siècle* commented that “we do not like to hear a Belgian minister say this” and wondered “which substances he has allowed to react in order to perform, in the German mentality and

¹⁰⁵⁷ MEMOR, “La Belgique dans l’Europe de demain. À propos de la “Déclaration de Sainte-Adresse”, 2 March 1916.

¹⁰⁵⁸ For the text of this lecture, see AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 60, “Discours tenu à la Sorbonne”, 11 March 1916.

¹⁰⁵⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 26 February and 1 March 1916.

responsibility, a decomposition with such huge consequences.” Neuray then publicly asked Beyens whether “the thirst for war, the ambition, and the cruelty of the German nation have not attested themselves from 4 August 1914 until today?” Misfortune would come over Europe and Belgium, Neuray concluded, “if diplomats would make so bold as to deduce from the alleged innocence of the German proletariat that it should be treated with indulgence.”¹⁰⁶⁰

For Neuray, it was clear that the on-going war was a battle of nations. His organic conception of the nation as a body did not allow him to differentiate between the different classes of German society. He did not accept that the German arms and legs uncritically executed the orders of the head. In Neuray’s view, so it seems, the German body’s bellicosity could only spring from the collaboration between its different parts. Beyens – and the Internationalist Vandervelde for that matter – held a different conception of the nation and did make a clear, class-based distinction between those who led and those who followed.

Beyens could use the support of his Socialist colleague, for in addition to most Belgian journalists and publicists in Le Havre, the annexationists in the government and in the Foreign Ministry still regarded him as their main enemy. After Beyens had hoodwinked Renkin at the end of February, Bassompierre and Orts had prepared a counteroffensive. They urged Ingenbleek to tell the King that Beyens’s “private” policy damaged the royal reputation, and that the King needed to replace the Foreign Minister within three months. They also prepared Renkin to convince Albert of the necessity to remove Beyens. Yet both projects blew up in their face. First, Bassompierre reported, Ingenbleek informed Orts that “King was under impression he [Orts] – I – Nothomb – Neuray – Patris & are all a bond who conspire together.” The second drawback, Bassompierre confided to his diaries, was the “failure” of Renkin’s visit to the King, who had not endorsed any of the Colonial Minister’s opinions and had merely told him that the council of ministers decided about policy matters. “This is clever,” Bassompierre remarked. Exercising indirect control over the Cabinet, Albert could indeed stimulate Renkin to expose his views during the Council’s reunions. Surely, this did not add to the popularity of “the King’s man” in the government and among the younger annexationists. So when Bassompierre heard of the Foreign Minister’s defeat in the Bethmann-Hollweg affair, he had no problem taking a malicious pleasure in seeing a “very touchy” Beyens in the rooms of the *Villa Hollandaise*. A few weeks later, Bassompierre could even joyfully record that “Beyens is very much on the totter.” Having “swallowed many humiliating pills lately,” the Foreign Minister had even told someone that he would offer his

¹⁰⁶⁰ NEURAY, Fernand, “Après la fête de la Sorbonne”, *Le XXe siècle*, 13 March 1916.

resignation. Bassompierre did not get his hopes up, though, convinced as he was that Beyens actually “clings to his portfolio very tight.”¹⁰⁶¹

Getting Personal

Yet events during the summer of 1916 would pose new challenges to Beyens’s position in the government. In early July, he met the British Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey to talk about the Scheldt, Luxemburg, and neutrality questions. Discussions about the first and the third issue would get Beyens into trouble upon his return to Le Havre. As to the Scheldt question, the Belgian government had decided that the Foreign Minister would submit three possible solutions to the approval of his British colleague. While two of these solutions required the incorporation of Dutch territory, Beyens and the King favoured a third, juridical arrangement. Yet in the days before Beyens’s arrival in London, a Dutch newspaper had accused not only the Belgian government of encouraging Belgian annexationist propaganda, but also the French and British governments of supporting these claims.¹⁰⁶² As Maria De Waele has demonstrated, by the Summer of 1916 the annexationist campaign launched by *Le XXe siècle* had reached its high point. In addition to almost daily claims on Dutch territory in Neuray’s newspaper, readers were confronted with several booklets containing the same messages. These were drafted by, amongst others, Maurice des Ombiaux and Pierre Nothomb, who in his July 1916 *La Barrière belge* depicted – in strongly worded terms – the Dutch people as the hereditary enemies of the Belgian nation. Similar comments filled the columns of the Belgian annexationist newspapers published in the Netherlands. From behind the scenes, Broqueville made sure that these publications were not censored.¹⁰⁶³ The Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* chose the right moment to react. Grey and his French colleague felt obliged to formally deny the existence of such policy, and asked Beyens to join in their declaration. To the Belgian Foreign Minister, it was perfectly clear that he had to do so if he wanted to avoid aggravating Belgium’s relations with its northern neighbour. It was also perfectly clear to Beyens that, in this tensed climate, he could only discuss the third, non-annexationist solution to the Scheldt question. As to the question of neutrality, Beyens proposed the replacement of the pre-war system by a unilateral Allied treaty of guarantee of Belgian independence and territorial integrity. In exchange, Belgium would pledge to defend its independence by means

¹⁰⁶¹ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 7, 12 and 18 March, 1 May, and 5 June 1916.

¹⁰⁶² SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 79-81.

¹⁰⁶³ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 402-413 and 418-445.

of an army recruited by general conscription. Beyens summarized the Belgian point of view on the Scheldt and neutrality questions in two memorandums that he submitted to Paris and London.¹⁰⁶⁴

The outcomes of Beyens's visit to London provoked fierce criticisms from annexationists in the press and in the government, who not only attacked the Foreign Minister's policy.¹⁰⁶⁵ The editors of *Het Belgisch Dagblad*, an annexationist newspaper published in The Hague, even went so far as to insinuate that during his mission in Berlin before the war, Beyens had betrayed his country by taking part in pro-German machinations. Beyens's actions did gain him the sympathy of the Flemish and Socialist leaders in the Netherlands. Especially the Catholic MP Frans Van Cauwelaert and the Liberal journalist Julius Hoste jr, son of the founder of *Het Laatste Nieuws*, took upon themselves to defend Beyens and his policy in *Vrij België*. This newspaper stood for a combination of a modest advocacy of the equality of French and Flemish in Belgium, loyalty to the Belgian monarchy, voluntary neutrality, and friendship with the Netherlands. The editors therefore opposed the "Franco-frenzy" and "greed for territory" proclaimed in *Le XXe siècle* and other nationalist newspapers.¹⁰⁶⁶ Beyens shared these views and wished to return the favour to Van Cauwelaert and Hoste by trying to restrain the campaign of the annexationists against what they labelled as the Flemish domestic enemy. Of course, Beyens's efforts would not succeed.¹⁰⁶⁷

In Le Havre, Renkin reproached Beyens for not having submitted the annexationist solutions to the Scheldt question. Beyens retorted that the Dutch press campaign gave him no other choice.¹⁰⁶⁸ In a letter to the King, he complained about the artlessness in diplomacy of Renkin and his annexationist colleagues, who "hoped that Sir Edward [Grey], after having examined and re-examined the question, would convince himself that the Scheldt estuary had to be given to us." According to Beyens, this was no different than "asking a Belgian to provide to England a solution to the Home Rule question."¹⁰⁶⁹ In the diplomat's eyes, the Colonial Minister clearly did not have a clue about the workings of sovereignty in international relations. Yet Renkin would not back down that easily. After the Cabinet meeting, the network of young annexationists put itself in motion. While Bassompierre was utterly displeased with the "revoltingly humble tone" of Beyens's Scheldt memorandum, he

¹⁰⁶⁴ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 304-305; PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 235;

¹⁰⁶⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 11 July 1916.

¹⁰⁶⁶ WILS, Lode, *Frans van Cauwelaert en de barst van België, 1910-1919*, Antwerp, 2001, 167-183.

¹⁰⁶⁷ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 432-441.

¹⁰⁶⁸ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 305.

¹⁰⁶⁹ AKP, AE, n° 39, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert of Belgium, 14 July 1916.

and Orts left it to Pierre Nothomb to draft the notes that Renkin could use to renew his attack on Beyens.¹⁰⁷⁰

Unfortunately, the text of the note that the Colonial Minister read at the next Cabinet meeting in early August 1916 has gone lost. Yet Beyens's reply to the allegations suggests that Renkin (and Orts) had not just played the ball. Beyens regretted that Renkin had not only gravely attacked his personal dignity, but had also stated the reproaches against him in a language that "fell short of parliamentary dignity." Was this an expression of an aristocratic diplomat's frustration with the rise to power of Christian Democratic politicians and the way the latter had reshaped political culture? Given that Beyens subsequently directed his attention towards the vile methods and populist ambitions which he believed that Renkin incarnated, this might well be the case. Beyens particularly loathed the Colonial Minister's accusations that he always went at it alone, not informing the Cabinet of important procedures. After going at great lengths to prove that he tried to consult his colleagues as much as possible, Beyens retorted the accusation, pointing to an eighty million loan for the Congo that the Colonial Minister was negotiating in London without the Cabinet's knowledge. Beyens was convinced that Renkin's campaign against him served only one purpose, namely his "visible aspirations to lead, in addition to the Colonial Department, the Foreign Ministry." Beyens then rhetorically asked his colleagues if they felt that Renkin was up to the task. His humble opinion, the Foreign Minister continued, led him to believe that Renkin's conceptions of international politics "would make the men of the profession laugh." Beyens originally wanted to state before the Council reunion that Renkin "knows nothing of diplomacy", but ultimately decided to soften this statement to "has only a feeble knowledge of the procedures of diplomacy." For Renkin, Beyens explained, "the solutions to the most complex questions reside in a few narrow and rigid formulas, and he anathematizes those who dare to reject them." Beyens concluded his reply declaring that his colleagues could choose "between the megalomaniac policy of a Minister who, without any responsibility, strives to impose to another Department his advices and methods, and a realist policy, of which I am a staunch supporter, a policy that does not renounce from our legitimate aspirations, but does not want to compromise our relations with our northern neighbours either."¹⁰⁷¹ Beyens thus represented himself as a professional foreign policy executer devoid of personal ambitions. He portrayed his opponent as a populist who did not know the first thing about diplomacy.

¹⁰⁷⁰ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 13 July and 1 August 1916.

¹⁰⁷¹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 60, Réponse à M. Renkin, 4 August 1916.

While his colleagues might have been surprised by the sight of Beyens for the first time taking off his dignified diplomat's cloak and counterattacking the politician who had lashed him out at many occasions, most of them decided to side with the Foreign Minister. Already at the end of May 1916, Beyens could confide to his wife that, with the exception of "the group of *Le XXe siècle*", his colleagues had finally decided "to have me as confrère."¹⁰⁷² After Beyens's return from London, especially the Finance Minister Aloys Van de Vyvere took upon himself to defend Beyens against his enemies. In letters to the Agriculture Minister Joris Helleputte, who himself was gradually lending Beyens more support, Van de Vyvere declared to see the hand of the younger annexationists in Renkin's attacks. "The whole horde Neuray has sworn to the defeat of Beyens," Van de Vyvere wrote, "but I will do everything I can to avoid that Beyens becomes the victim of this conspiracy." As the main reasons for doing so, Van de Vyvere invoked not only his wish to avoid "the triumph of the horde of the agitated", which he abhorred, but also the fact that "against my expectations, Beyens has assumed an open and loyal method of cooperation with his colleagues, while Davignon limited himself to confer with Broqueville and hid everything from us."¹⁰⁷³ Van de Vyvere suited the action to the word, and headed for De Panne, fearing that "the King has let himself set against Beyens." Yet, Van de Vyvere specified, not Renkin but Broqueville had contrived to do this. The Finance Minister indeed knew that Albert disliked the second memorandum that Beyens had drafted, and particularly the promise to the Allies that it contained and which stated that Belgium would uphold the general conscription after the war. While Beyens believed that maintaining a standing army was what the King wanted, he seemed to ignore that Albert found it much more important that Belgium did not enter into any agreements with the Allies for the duration of the war. Van de Vyvere also knew that Broqueville was always on the lookout to benefit from any of the Foreign Minister's possible missteps.¹⁰⁷⁴

The Cabinet Chief would succeed. He owed his success to strategies that early modern favourites would have envied. Broqueville might indeed have realized that King Albert's authority over foreign and military policy, which he inherited from his predecessor, was unseen in other Western democracies, and reminded of the privileges of ancien régime princes. In those days, controlling access to the King was the key to the favourite's

¹⁰⁷² AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 25 May 1916.

¹⁰⁷³ ARA, T 013, "Papiers Schollaert-Helleputte", n° 613, Aloys Van de Vyvere aan Joris Helleputte, 26 July and 10 August 1916. See also PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 267; and SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 85.

¹⁰⁷⁴ ARA, T 013, "Papiers Schollaert-Helleputte", n° 613, Aloys Van de Vyvere aan Joris Helleputte, 26 July and 10 August 1916.

success.¹⁰⁷⁵ Albert's geographical remoteness from the world of politics and Broqueville's having set up office near the sovereign surely helped. Before Beyens had left for London, Broqueville had already come a long way but still did not enjoy the King's full favour. In early June 1916, Albert had confided to his diaries that Broqueville did "not seem to lay all his cards on the table" and was "too much of my opinion." The King indeed knew perfectly well that "elsewhere he is a partisan of annexations." To gain the royal sympathy, it was important to remove Albert's confidants, especially since the favourite's position had just opened up following the death of Waxweiler, of whom the King felt that "one does not find twice in a lifetime such certain and enlightened friends like him."¹⁰⁷⁶

Since Broqueville could not await Beyens's death, he had to adopt another strategy to have the Foreign Minister removed. While Beyens was talking with Grey about Belgium's commitment to the Allied cause, Broqueville wrote a long letter to the King about a mission to the British capital that he had recently undertaken himself, together with the regretted Waxweiler. In the last three sentences, he repeated up to four times that he had not made any commitment to anyone about Belgium's future, and concluded that "it would be an extreme clumsiness to act otherwise."¹⁰⁷⁷ Yet his acting according to the King's wishes did not gain Broqueville the access he desired. He therefore complained that since his return he had not received an invitation for a royal audience. Albert retorted that he preferred his ministers to formulate their views in writing instead of coming to see him when it pleased them and "talking point-blank" about questions that he had not been able to examine. "In the times of my predecessor," the King said to himself, "a similar system would never have been allowed."¹⁰⁷⁸ While Albert had broken with Leopold II's autocratic ways in peace time, it seems that in times of war he greatly valued the royal privileges that his predecessor had managed to uphold.

The Cabinet meeting after Beyens's return from London created for Broqueville an excellent occasion to run down the Foreign Minister and to present himself as the true defender of the King's interests. Discussing the neutrality memorandum that Beyens had sent to Grey and submitted to the Council of Ministers, Broqueville pointed out to the King that he found the Foreign Minister's promise to uphold the general conscription after the war

¹⁰⁷⁵ For an excellent example of how these procedures worked in Brussels three centuries earlier, see RAEYMAEKERS, Dries, "The 'Gran privado' of Archduke Albert : Rodrigo Niño y Iasso, Count of Añover (ca. 1560-1620)", in René VERMEIR (eds.), *Agentes e identidades en movimiento : España y los Países Bajos, siglos XVI-XVIII*, Madrid, 2011, 129-149.

¹⁰⁷⁶ THIELEMANS, "Les *Carnets de guerre*", 270, 272.

¹⁰⁷⁷ AKP, AE, n° 61, Charles de Broqueville to Albert of Belgium, 5 July 1916.

¹⁰⁷⁸ THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1916-1918", 357-359.

“particularly inopportune and maladroit.” Through it, Belgium “committed itself”, the Cabinet Chief underlined. Backed by the entire Council, he had called Beyens to order, Broqueville continued, stressing how such commitment constituted “an abdication of our sovereign powers”, and that it was “inadmissible that such imprudence was committed before talking things through with the King and the government.” Convinced that this sufficed to raise Albert’s doubts about his Foreign Minister’s qualities, Broqueville decided to portray them as irremediable. “Baron Beyens has this unfortunate tendency to always go ahead of others, even if he is not asked anything,” Broqueville wrote, adding that “this habit has become his second nature, and will cost Belgium dearly.” Broqueville then discussed the Scheldt memorandum, stating that he had “energetically defended” Beyens, and thus the King’s views, against the attacks of Renkin. Yet also in this matter, the Cabinet Chief felt obliged to approach Beyens the next day and warn him about how “dangerous and little adroit” his manner of proceeding had been. “Alas,” Broqueville concluded his letter to the King, Beyens’s “clumsiness does not inspire confidence.”¹⁰⁷⁹

A few days later, Albert met with Broqueville and Beyens separately. Broqueville came in first, repeated his allegations against Beyens, and handed the King a report drafted by Renkin (or rather by Nothomb) and containing the Colonial Minister’s criticisms of Beyens’s policy. He also managed to convince the King that the government had by now come to oppose any alliance with other countries. Moreover, while only a month earlier Albert had noted exactly the opposite, Broqueville had manoeuvred so effectively that the King now confided to his diaries, without any further comment, that “the Cabinet Chief is against any territorial extension to the detriment of the Netherlands.”¹⁰⁸⁰ Albert seemed to be convinced that Broqueville had come round, and started to regard him as his prime ally in the government. To confirm their newly found communion of minds, the King wrote Broqueville a letter in which he made into his own the words that Broqueville had uttered to please him. More importantly, Albert concluded his letter stating that henceforth conversations with foreign politicians should be undertaken by two ministers, one of which had to be the Cabinet Chief. The King even allowed Broqueville to read these statements aloud at the next reunion of the Council of Ministers. This, of course, made the disavowal of Beyens complete. Conversely, Broqueville’s star was on the rise. Despite warnings from Van de Vyvere and Hymans that the Cabinet Chief was not the man he pretended to be, Albert made Broqueville into his principal correspondent and granted him numerous audiences. At these occasions, the

¹⁰⁷⁹ AKP, AE, n° 61, Charles de Broqueville to Albert of Belgium, 18 July 1916.

¹⁰⁸⁰ THIELEMANS, “*Les Carnets de guerre*”, 276.

King found Broqueville to be “extraordinarily flexible and amiable.” By October 1916, a diary entry describing a visit from the Cabinet Chief and stating “Extraordinarily flexible as always. Falls out violently against Beyens”, did not elicit any further reflections from the King.¹⁰⁸¹

However, this does not mean that Albert had been completely overwhelmed by Broqueville’s charm. He might just as well merely have tried to benefit from the Cabinet Chief’s ambitions in order to further his own interests. Albert placed Baron Beyens under the tutelage of Broqueville because he no longer seemed to see the diplomat as the mere executor of no other than the royal foreign policy. The King wrote twice in his diaries that Beyens had “lacked firmness” in his conversations with Grey, and repeated twice to Van de Vyvere that the Foreign Minister had “made a mistake.”¹⁰⁸² After Beyens had tried to make it clear to the King that Broqueville actually favoured an alliance with France, Albert noted: “To me, he [Broqueville] writes that he is against any policy of *compromission* even with the Allies. So, what to believe? The only certainty in all this is the craftiness of politicians.”¹⁰⁸³ Surely, the latter part of this last sentence primarily referred to Broqueville, whom Albert still ranked among the craftiest of ministers. Yet could it be that he also had Beyens in mind when writing these words? Perhaps the Foreign Minister had to experience that the flipside of becoming a “confrère”, was that the King had come to regard him as one. After all, since the beginning of the war Albert had seen many politicians turn into diplomats, and knew of the aspirations of many more in that direction. This certainly made the other way around look more plausible.

In any case, Beyens’s mission to London would not lead to his fall. It did give him a clearer picture of who his friends and enemies in the government were. He might have realized that he remained in the King’s grace partly due to the efforts of Van de Vyvere, who during two consecutive royal audiences had not only held passionate pleas for Beyens’s conduct, but had also convincingly held up the prospect of Broqueville’s dictatorship if Beyens were to be dismissed.¹⁰⁸⁴ The Foreign Minister owed a better knowledge of his enemies to the King, who showed Renkin’s note that he got from Broqueville to Beyens, without knowing that the Cabinet Chief had annotated it, approving even the most vehement criticisms that it contained. “It was a drama,” Albert noted, “but he calmed down soon

¹⁰⁸¹ THIELEMANS, “Les *Carnets de guerre*”, 290 and 292.

¹⁰⁸² THIELEMANS, “Les *Carnets de guerre*”, 277-278.

¹⁰⁸³ THIELEMANS, “Les *Carnets de guerre*”, 279. The French word *compromission* stands for a compromise that involves compromising away one’s principles.

¹⁰⁸⁴ ARA, T 013, “Papiers Schollaert-Helleputte”, n° 613, Aloys Van de Vyvere aan Joris Helleputte, 10 August 1916; THIELEMANS, “Les *Carnets de guerre*”, 276.

enough.” Again, Beyens offered his resignation. Only the King’s urge to stay and fight for what he believed, he confided to Hymans, convinced him to withdraw it.¹⁰⁸⁵

Circumvention

Beyens’s loyalty to his sovereign remained intact. Soon, however, a third major challenge would put his faith to the test. In mid-December 1916, the German Chancellor declared in the *Reichstag* that his government was prepared to start peace negotiations. A few days later, the American president Woodrow Wilson asked the warring countries to state their war aims. For Albert and his ministers, this double request for a reaction could have come at a better time. In the weeks before, the King had urged Broqueville to ask the ministers to make a clear choice between working towards an honourable but negotiated peace on the one hand, and fighting until the bitter end on the other hand. Albert had hinted strongly that he would only accept the first option, and asked Broqueville to read his letter aloud to the other Ministers. Broqueville, who knew perfectly well that the government counted many *jusqu’au boutistes* in its ranks and also did not want to exasperate France and Great-Britain, tried to convince the King that reading his letter would expose the crown in a dangerous way. Albert, however, would not give in.¹⁰⁸⁶

Broqueville wanted to avoid both the relations with the Allies from deteriorating and having the King’s wrath poured upon him. This meant he had to play it cleverly. He informed Beyens and asked him if the royal letter could really be read at the Cabinet meeting. Of course, the Cabinet Chief knew that Beyens’s loyalty to the King would incite him to cover the crown while at the same time trying to transmit the royal message. Beyens indeed discouraged Broqueville to read the letter and drafted a note in which he inserted the King’s ideas. He also took it upon himself to read this note to his colleagues. After the Cabinet meeting, Beyens informed Albert that his proceedings were inspired only by his wish to protect the King from attacks by Renkin and Carton de Wiart, the latter of whom he named “the instigator of the annexationist campaign of *Le XXe Siècle*.”¹⁰⁸⁷ Also Broqueville wrote to the King, but he used a different argument. He really wanted to read the royal letter, the Cabinet Chief declared, but Beyens had made this impossible. Broqueville explained that at the onset of the Cabinet reunion the Foreign Minister “immediately read the long note in

¹⁰⁸⁵ THIELEMANS, “*Les Carnets de guerre*”, 277; PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 267.

¹⁰⁸⁶ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 312-314.

¹⁰⁸⁷ AKP, AE, n° 61, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert of Belgium, 11 December 1916.

which he developed more or less the same points as the King, and this incident led me to not read the royal letter; that would have been forcing the note and provoking suspicion.”¹⁰⁸⁸

Albert apparently accepted Broqueville’s allegations and decided to keep a closer watch on Beyens’s proceedings. He summoned a sequence of Cabinet meetings to be held under his presidency. The King opposed the wish of the Allied Powers that the Belgian government joined in a common reply to both invitations, and preferred a separate Belgian response that would contain the country’s comparatively more limited war aims and leave room for peace negotiations with Germany. The King knew that Beyens favoured a middle way: Belgium would give independent answers that differed in form but not in contents from the Allied replies. Albert did not like this. In a note that he strategically handed to Broqueville just before the Cabinet meetings, he even accused Beyens of neglecting Belgium’s interests in order to curry favour with the Allies. With the support of the Cabinet Chief and a few other ministers, the King managed to have the government decide that Beyens and Broqueville would try to convince the Allies to support Belgium’s decision to send separate replies stating the country’s aims of full political and economic independence, reparations, and military security. Yet events transpired rather differently. The Belgian proposal met with fierce opposition from both Paris and London, and Belgian delegates decided to give in. In the end, the country’s war aims were included in the Allied response to Germany, and stated only that “the King and his government ... want a peace which will assure Belgium legitimate reparations, guarantees, and securities for the future.” Allied pressure also caused the Belgian delegates to accept the same vague formulation in Belgium’s reply to Wilson. Despite the King’s insistence, no reference was made to the restoration of the country’s full political and economic independence, nor to the territorial integrity of Belgium and the colony.¹⁰⁸⁹

Although Beyens had never acted without the approval of at least Broqueville, Albert attributed what he considered a diplomatic failure entirely to his Foreign Minister. The King felt that he had witnessed the materialization of his fears that Beyens would lack firmness before the Allies.¹⁰⁹⁰ In mid-January 1917, commenting on the Belgian reply to Wilson, Albert inveighed bitterly against his Foreign Minister. “You have been circumvented by Mr Cambon,” the King wrote, adding that as a result “the goal that the Council of Ministers has set itself has not been achieved.” To Beyens’s conviction that the Allied Powers needed to be

¹⁰⁸⁸ AKP, AE, n° 61, Charles de Broqueville to Albert of Belgium, 10 December 1916.

¹⁰⁸⁹ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 316-318; PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 236-237.

¹⁰⁹⁰ For the expression of these fears, see the telegrams that the King had sent to Broqueville on 25 and 26 December 1916, in THIELEMANS, “Lettres du Roi Albert 1916-1918”, 387. See also SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 90.

humoured, Albert replied: “Let us not be so naïve to let ourselves be taken in by this ogre game.” Perhaps somewhat naïvely himself, the King was indeed convinced that British and French public opinion would never allow the leaders of the Allies to abandon Belgium. In the conclusion of his letter, he added lack of loyalty to the accusations of diplomatic incapacity and ingenuity that he made against Beyens. He saw the changes in the reply to Wilson as “proof that while one presents me with a project, one communicates already a copy to a foreign functionary.”¹⁰⁹¹

Irrespective of his awareness of which machinations had moved the King to formulate such harsh criticisms, to Beyens they came as a shock. Probably not long after he had swallowed the royal reproaches, he confided his frustrations to his wife. In “a harsh, outrageous letter”, Beyens wrote, the King “accused me ... of letting myself be circumvented by good old Cambon, the only man you can rely on, and granted me a certificate of incompetence because due to lack of firmness, I have not obtained the inscription of the Belgian war aims.” Beyens believed that he could have easily retorted, arguing that the eventual response to Wilson implicitly contained all of Belgium’s war aims, and that it was actually the behaviour of the King that had created most of the country’s diplomatic difficulties, having lead the Allies to believe that Albert was ready for a separate peace. Retorting, however, would not have remedied his sentiments of humiliation. Beyens decided not to respond to the royal letter, and even not to write to the King ever again. Albert “would have never dared to write a similar letter to one of his parliamentary Ministers,” the diplomat noted, aware that “with me he thinks he can do everything.” Yet, Beyens felt, “this is not how one writes to an old and dedicated servant who has proven his dedication.” The only option was to resign, the Foreign Minister believed. His sense of abandonment even led him to believe that if he stayed on, “the King and without doubt also the Government and the Country, dissatisfied later on with the peace treaty, would agree to make me a scapegoat.” Beyens could only conclude that “I am truly not made to serve King Albert, and I cannot, at sixty-one, yield to the petulance and the procedures of this young man who has great qualities, but a sad character.” He even declared to prefer King Leopold II, “with whom at least one knew what to expect.” Beyens did have one regret, namely “not to be able to serve my country in these days of morning when it needs all its children,” yet he found some consolation in the fact that for a year and a half, he had done so, with all his forces. “I have nothing to reproach myself with,” Beyens found.¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁹¹ THIELEMANS, “Lettres du Roi Albert 1916-1918”, 396-397.

¹⁰⁹² AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim,

Beyens's letter was written in the heat of the moment and to someone who had his entire confidence. On the one hand, it makes clear that the Foreign Minister still defined himself as not being a politician. He would ever remain a diplomat. On the other hand, the letter reveals interesting aspects of what being a diplomat meant to him. Beyens did not wish to be a courtier who stood very close to the King but at the same time had to dance to the royal piping. Rather, he saw himself as a civil servant imbued with a sense of patriotism that required him to honourably serve both King and Country. In Beyens's perception, the latter concepts were inextricably intertwined: serving the Country meant acting with the confidence of the King. If the sovereign had lost confidence in him or behaved in a way that harmed the Country's interests, the diplomat could do nothing but offer his resignation.

This is what Beyens did the same day in a letter to Van den Steen, the King's chief of cabinet. Invoking the royal accusation of having let himself be "gulled" by Cambon, and "other hardly justified reproaches", Beyens asked Van den Steen to request the King "to confide to more dignified hands the terrible burden that I have only accepted out of dedication to His Person and to the Country." He added that he would accept any ground for his resignation, and would reveal the fact of the matter to no one.¹⁰⁹³

Yet a few days later, Beyens could no longer withhold himself from justifying his actions to the King. The result was a long and candid letter that, with the exception of the comments on Albert's personality, contained the same criticisms that the diplomat had formulated in the letter to his wife, and more.¹⁰⁹⁴ Beyens stressed that the King had not expressed his dissatisfaction with the final drafts of the reply to Wilson, while he had been given the possibility. So how could Beyens know that he did not have the royal approval. The Foreign Minister also specified the Allied suspicions of the King, alluding to "mysterious journeys to De Panne" that alleged peace mediators had been seen to undertake. In addition to retorting, Beyens amply explained the policy line that he had followed, and which had essentially remained unchanged since the day Albert had appointed him Foreign Minister. What hurt Beyens almost as much as the "certificate of insufficiency" that he received, was that the King had took on the allegations that the annexationists had always launched against him concerning his conversations with Cambon.¹⁰⁹⁵

Although Beyens still felt deeply humiliated and had offered his resignation, he left the door open for a renewed understanding. "The King can rely on his Foreign Minister, who

¹⁰⁹³ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 16 December 1916.

¹⁰⁹⁴ The letter has been published in BEYENS, *Un diplomate belge*, 269-273.

¹⁰⁹⁵ The most objective discussion of this letter is to be found in PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 237-239.

is profoundly dedicated to him, and who would be grateful if He did not accuse him anymore of naïveté and weakness,” Beyens wrote, adding that “such reproach, I dare to say, would be undeserved.” The Foreign Minister then associated the royal comments with a line of thought that Albert did certainly not sympathize with, stating that he knew well “that it is customary, and Mr Renkin has not hesitated to do so, to criticize my Department, to treat it as weak and pusillanimous.” Yet, Beyens opposed, “I challenge my colleagues to prove our lack of zeal and firmness.”¹⁰⁹⁶ Referring to the continuous attacks that the Belgian House on Diplomatic Island had to endure from politicians ever since the outbreak of the war, Beyens subtly vented his disbelief that the Ruler of the Belgian resort had adopted the ideas of the besiegers against his most loyal servants. Had Albert temporarily forgotten that the politicians, and especially Renkin, had ambitions that were not compatible with his own?

§ 4. The Elimination of Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens

In any event, Beyens’s fall from grace was less effectively stimulated by Renkin than by Broqueville. The King’s suspicions of Beyens’s cordial relations with Cambon, once considered one of the Foreign Minister’s prime assets, had indeed been stirred up by Broqueville. These contacts had always been a thorn in the side of Baron Guillaume, the Belgian minister plenipotentiary in Paris whose annexationist sympathies had gained him the sympathy of Renkin. They were equally disliked by Anthony Klobukowski, Guillaume’s French counterpart in Le Havre who held the friendship of Broqueville.¹⁰⁹⁷ Somewhere between Christmas 1916 and New Year 1917, when Beyens and Broqueville were in Paris, the Cabinet Chief directly experienced how these dealings took place. Cambon informed Beyens that the Allies were convinced that Belgium was actually striving for a separate peace with Germany. This incited the Foreign Minister to reply with an elaborate justification of Belgium’s position, arguing that Belgium was a violated neutral and wanted no alliances but at the same time did not wish to conclude a separate peace. Broqueville approved of this letter, but did not countersign it. He had indeed read that Beyens had also written that Belgium agreed with France and Great-Britain that the German overture was merely an attempt to drive a wedge between Belgium and the Allies. This, Broqueville knew, would not

¹⁰⁹⁶ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert of Belgium, 21 January 1917.

¹⁰⁹⁷ For Renkin’s appreciation of Guillaume, see AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 22, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 28 and 29 December 1916. For the friendship between Klobulowski and Broqueville, see KLOBUKOWSKI, *Souvenirs de Belgique*, Brussels, 1928.

please the King. Since he had managed to acquire great access to the royal residence in De Panne, he could easily capitalize on Beyens's late December letter to Cambon to put all the dealings of the Foreign Minister with the French Secretary-General in a bad light.¹⁰⁹⁸

Persona Non Grata

On 15 January 1917, the day between the King cast a slur on Beyens and the latter offered his resignation, Broqueville judged the time right to add some fuel to the fire. The letter that he sent to the King enlivened the epistolary conversation between Van den Steen and Van der Elst. "A letter from Charles [de Broqueville] has arrived that reveals indiscretions from Eugène [Beyens], that is the communication to the *Quai d'Orsay* of ciphered telegrams sent from here!! That is inconceivable!" Van den Steen exclaimed, wondering "how could he commit such imprudence?" The King's *chef de cabinet* claimed that this only confirmed his master's suspicions of Beyens's dealings with Cambon, which had already given rise to "the quite sharp letter" that Albert had sent to Beyens. Van den Steen wished to know what effect that writing had produced: "Has one spoken about it? Or has the shower been received in silence?"¹⁰⁹⁹ Van der Elst confirmed that Beyens had told him about the royal letter. The Secretary-General agreed that it was "sharp", and found the reproaches undeserved. "Charles says it is so," Van der Elst explained, "but you know his ambitions." The Secretary-General also condemned the royal decision, describing Beyens's departure as "very lamentable" and declaring that he "would never have taken the responsibility for this act that will astonish the great majority and only rejoice a few military men and the adversaries of the cautious policy that we have tried to follow."¹¹⁰⁰ Van der Elst clearly sympathized with Beyens, and even seemed inclined to throw in his lot with the Foreign Minister.

For the time being, however, no changes took place at the head of the Department. The King ordered Van den Steen to pick up the pieces, or at least to meet Beyens part of the way. Albert claimed that he had not wanted to cast doubt on the intelligence and dedication of his Foreign Minister, but stressed that Cambon defended other interests than those of Belgium. Justifying the harsh tone of his letter, the King asked Van den Steen "to tell Baron Beyens that it is my duty to always be very frank with my Ministers when I talk with them about issues where the interests of the country are at stake." As a politician in times of war, Albert

¹⁰⁹⁸ PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 236; SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 90.

¹⁰⁹⁹ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 16 January 1917.

¹¹⁰⁰ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 18 January 1917.

seemed to imply, Beyens could not expect the same niceties that befell diplomats in peace time. Nevertheless, the King explicitly ordered Van den Steen to write to Beyens that he had “not in any way wanted to suggest” that the Foreign Minister had lost his confidence.¹¹⁰¹

Yet Beyens certainly had. The royal letter from 14 January 1917 was the last one he would receive in many years, and he would have to wait for more than twenty months before the King granted him an audience.¹¹⁰² Nevertheless, the Foreign Minister stayed on until mid-July 1917, when Broqueville baldly asked him, in the name of the King, to offer his resignation.¹¹⁰³ By then, a number of secret peace initiatives, from which Beyens was kept out, had convinced Albert and the Cabinet Chief that it would not take long before the war would come to an end, which required a – from their point of view – more reliable Foreign Minister.¹¹⁰⁴ This would be Broqueville himself, who claimed to take up the direction of Belgian foreign policy with utter reluctance. Few believed these sentiments to be genuine.¹¹⁰⁵

Broqueville had thus managed to oust Beyens from the Foreign Ministry and to take his place. This had required some finishing touches that went beyond discrediting Beyens’s relations with Cambon. Informing the Foreign Minister that his resignation was requested, Broqueville invoked as main motive the fact that Beyens was *persona non grata* at the *Quai d’Orsay*. This stigmatization was the result of a long campaign conducted against the Foreign Minister by the nationalists, and aptly employed by Broqueville to his own benefit. Rumours about alleged aversion towards Beyens at the French Foreign Ministry had already spread by early January 1916 and, as we have seen, were rendered public by Neuray in *Le XXe siècle* after the Declaration of Sainte-Adresse.¹¹⁰⁶ The annexationist industrialist Barbanson, who was well connected in Parisian military and political circles, seems to have been the instigator.¹¹⁰⁷ In late December 1915, he wrote to Broqueville that the Cabinet Chief should take over the Foreign Ministry and should send Beyens to replace Baron Guillaume in Paris, but at the same time pointing out that this could be problematic, since “Beyens, they say, does not have an odour of sanctity about him at the *Quai d’Orsay*.”¹¹⁰⁸ While Barbanson instigated

¹¹⁰¹ THIELEMANS, “Lettres du Roi Albert 1916-1918”, 399.

¹¹⁰² The first time Beyens would see the King again, was on 8 October, after Albert had invited him to a Crown council. See SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 92. The earliest letter from Albert to Beyens from after 14 January 1917 that has been found, dates from late November 1925. See AKP, “Reproductie brieven Koning Albert 1919-1934”, Albert of Belgium to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 26 November 1925.

¹¹⁰³ SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 93.

¹¹⁰⁴ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 329.

¹¹⁰⁵ SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 94.

¹¹⁰⁶ See SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 4 January 1916.

¹¹⁰⁷ On Barbanson, see WILLEQUET, “Gaston Barbanson”.

¹¹⁰⁸ ARA, T 029, “Papiers de Charles de Broqueville”, n° 43, Gaston Barbanson to Charles de Broqueville, 2 January 1916.

them, dissatisfaction with the Beyens-Cambon conversations led Klobukowski and Baron Guillaume to help spread these rumours.¹¹⁰⁹ As we have seen, Broqueville started to capitalize on suspicions surrounding the Beyens-Cambon conversations from late December 1916 onwards. According to Baron Beyens's son, Broqueville combined these suspicions with the rumours of French antipathetic feelings towards the Belgian Foreign Minister to discredit the latter with the King. Citing extracts from his father's diaries that he removed from the Beyens papers in the Belgian Foreign Ministry Archives in 1980, Baron Antoine Beyens claims that Broqueville had deliberately misconstrued confidential information that his father had revealed to him. Apparently, Cambon had suggested to Beyens that his resignation as Foreign Minister would be welcomed by the French Political Director, Philippe Berthelot. In a letter to the King written at the end of January 1917, Broqueville then depicted this revelation as a French loss of confidence in the Belgian Foreign Minister.¹¹¹⁰

The timing of this letter suited the Cabinet Chief's ambitions perfectly. Just a few days before, Ingenbleek informed the King that Beyens's neutralist stance not only aroused Allied suspicions, but also threatened to incite several Ministers to leave the government. Moreover, Beyens's policy discredited the King, because no one would accept that the Foreign Minister would defy the Cabinet without royal backing. As a consequence, Ingenbleek continued, critical voices invoked the German pedigree of the King to explain his refusal to expand his country at the expense of the German Empire.¹¹¹¹ Ingenbleek had fallen from the King's grace only weeks after Beyens, his adversary when they both served in the Palace, had entered the Foreign Ministry. In September 1915, Albert had sent him off to Paris without telling him the causes of his loss of favour. Interestingly enough, Ingenbleek gradually regained the royal sympathy while Beyens was losing it. The King would call him back to De Panne about a month after Beyens's resignation.¹¹¹² This was courtly politics at its best.

With similar criticisms coming from different directions, the King decided to send Count Van den Steen to Paris to subtly inquire about these allegations. In letters to Van der Elst, Albert's *chef de cabinet* regretted to encounter "a lot of hostility against Eugène," whom many identified as the cause of the "marked coolness" in Belgium's relations with France and Great-Britain. More importantly, Van den Steen continued, Beyens "inspires a mistrust that

¹¹⁰⁹ See SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 4 January 1916.

See also in the same diaries, the entries from 17, 21, and 22 January, and 9, 26, and 27 February 1916.

¹¹¹⁰ BEYENS, *Un diplomate belge*, 192-195 and 274-275; PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 269.

¹¹¹¹ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 324.

¹¹¹² SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 92; VALCKE, Tony, "Jules Ingenbleek", in Tony VALCKE (ed.), *De fonteinen van de Oranjeberg. Politiek-institutionele geschiedenis van de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen van 1830 tot nu, deel 4: Biografieën van twintigste-eeuwse beleidsmakers*, Ghent, 2003, 65.

the Sovereign suffers under because He is deemed to support him.” In addition, Van den Steen remarked, “the ultra-patriots do not forgive him for his declaration to Holland about the Scheldt,” which made his presence at the future peace conference nearly impossible. “Will he easily renounce from this illusion?” Van den Steen wondered. The same evening, however, Van den Steen had to adjust his information about Beyens. Having met Baron de Gaiffier, whom Beyens had sent to Paris to replace Baron Guillaume, he was happy to notify Van der Elst that “Eugène’s reputation at the *Quai d’Orsay* is not as bad as some say.” The Foreign Minister, Gaiffier had explained to Van den Steen, was actually vilified by a “small group of ‘*patriotards*’ and by a certain colleague who lusts for his place.”¹¹¹³

Van den Steen surely informed the King about what he had gathered from Paris, although he might not have mentioned Gaiffier’s reference to Broqueville’s ambitions. Spurred by Van der Elst, he also subtly tried to influence the royal disposition towards Beyens. In April 1917, he wrote to the Secretary-General that he did not believe that “the silence observed towards Eugène since what you call the *repêchage*” meant that the end of Beyens was near. Quite the contrary, Van den Steen believed that the Foreign Minister’s second chance was going so well that it had “put him firmly in the saddle again.” Yet more than a month later, after Van den Steen had gone to considerable lengths to explain to Albert in what dignified manner Baron Beyens dealt with the King’s silence, the latter’s evasive response might have suggested to Van den Steen that the die had long been cast.¹¹¹⁴

Because Van den Steen had spent a few months away from De Panne, he indeed only realized belatedly that Broqueville had continued to calumniate the Foreign Minister during this time, writing the King weekly letters that combined political and military reflections with comments on Beyens’s behaviour. At the end of February 1917, he tried to convince the King that maintaining Beyens at the head of the Foreign Ministry until the end of the war could have dangerous consequences at the peace negotiations, but that it was recommendable to await the right time to replace him. A few weeks later, Broqueville made his attacks on the Foreign Minister even more personal, claiming that Beyens “is so absorbed by his own ideas that he can never understand those of others.”¹¹¹⁵ The King came to accept this point of view. He also came to rely more and more on Broqueville alone in foreign policy matters.¹¹¹⁶

¹¹¹³ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 6 February and 6 February ‘soir’ 1917.

¹¹¹⁴ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 1 April and 9 May 1917.

¹¹¹⁵ Broqueville quoted in VELAERS, *Albert I*, 324.

¹¹¹⁶ See THIELEMANS, “Lettres du roi Albert 1916-1918”, 399-409.

Yet the immediate cause that determined the time of Beyens's removal had to do with the supplying of the occupied country. The King was very dissatisfied with its inadequacy and blamed the government, which he claimed not to be up to the task. In a letter to Broqueville written in mid-June 1917, Albert let it be known that he refused to share in the blame for mistakes that he had no part in, and often not even knew about. "I have had enough," the King exclaimed, impressing on the Cabinet Chief that only changes in the government could remedy the situation. Albert specified that the "superior interests of the country" required "men of value and energy", and added that changes were also necessary "in order to conserve your prestige and your influence, which I prize highly." The King therefore invited Broqueville to De Panne, where they could discuss what changes to push through.¹¹¹⁷

Remarkably enough, only one head rolled after Broqueville's audience with the King on 1 July 1917. For the next weeks, Van den Steen and Van der Elst only gradually came to know the fact of the matter. Apparently, in the build-up to the Cabinet meeting in mid-July where Broqueville was expected to announce which changes in the government would be made, relations between the Belgian inhabitants of Le Havre tensed up. "One can imagine what it is like here in terms of hatred, jealousy, slander, and calumny," Van der Elst wrote to his friend in De Panne, having to regret that "our compatriots forget that they are not at home and that by flinging dirt at each other they incur disgust and destroy the prestige of the country." Van den Steen could confirm that "the kettle is boiling", but did not know what would come out of it. Eventually, Van der Elst found out that Broqueville had told the Council of Ministers "that Beyens had offered his resignation to the King a few months ago, because he felt suspected by the French government." The Secretary-General felt the need to add "as you know, this is not true."¹¹¹⁸ Van den Steen certainly knew that in January 1917 very different reasons had incited Beyens to offer his resignation.

With all the tensions building up towards the day of Broqueville's declaration, and all the expectations surrounding it, the fact that it led to the replacement of only one Minister will certainly have increased the sense of humiliation that befell the victim. In a letter written to his wife in early July 1917, Baron Beyens pointed his finger to the men who had so unjustly treated him. First, there were "certain Belgians" who had "a disproportionate ambition" to play a leading part in the peace negotiations, and therefore sent "a whole raft of imputations" to De Panne. After having implicitly referred to the ambitious Broqueville, Beyens named the

¹¹¹⁷ THIELEMANS, "Lettres du roi Albert 1916-1918", 413-414.

¹¹¹⁸ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 4 and July 1917; Léon van der Elst to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 4 and 15 July 1917.

King, who would have held “a conducive disposition” towards these imputations. “The morals of the King have never been at the same level as his other qualities,” Beyens confided to his wife, explaining that “His Majesty has always had a fault-finding spirit, and gladly holds his Ministers responsible for every unpleasantness that happens to him.” Yet Beyens foremost saw himself as “one of the designated and sacrificed victims of the hatred of Neuray, Patris, Renkin, and *tutti quanti*.” Somewhat unpersuasively, Beyens assured his wife that “all this leaves me quite indifferent.” Convinced that he had done more than his duty, not sparing his time, his efforts and his health, the Foreign Minister claimed to be able “to depart with head high, and a smile around my lips, a little disgusted by my compatriots, and their intrigues, but not loving my country less for it.” The only thing that bothered him, Beyens declared, was that he would not be able to sign a profitable peace for his country, although he could predict that “this peace will certainly not satisfy anyone in Belgium.”¹¹¹⁹

Bitter Pills

After Broqueville informed him, a week later, that his resignation was requested, Beyens tried as best as he could to honourably accept his fate. Yet he would have to swallow some more bitter pills. Beyens experienced the first “great bitterness” after having ascertained that the King did not wish to see him. “It would have been so easy to have me come to De Panne, to explain to me what one expected from me, to give good or bad reasons and to let me prepare my departure,” Beyens believed, adding that this would have given him the possibility “to ask to be discharged from my offices immediately.”¹¹²⁰

The King had thus failed to reckon with the dignified treatment that diplomats were entitled to, Beyens seemed to feel. This comprised a personal contact with the sovereign that they served, and whose interests they believed to defend. The only honourable way for diplomats to leave their functions, so it seems, was that the King personally informed them that their services were no longer needed in those functions. This was exactly why also Count Charles de Lalaing felt so humiliated that his resignation was not accompanied by some explanatory words from the King. The reasons for this diplomatic sensitivity lay to some extent in the diplomats’ self-perception as apolitical civil servants who executed the policies of King and Country. Baron Beyens had stated this very clearly when he accepted to head the Belgian Foreign Ministry in July 1915, and had repeated it the many times when he offered

¹¹¹⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 5 July 1917.

¹¹²⁰ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 12 and 13 July 1917.

his resignation. Similar statements were also uttered by Count Van den Steen in the Spring of 1917, after he had a minor incident with the King. “In any case,” Van den Steen had declared at that occasion, “I will always be the loyal servant, who has come because one has called him, without pretention, without ambition, staying out of intrigues, limiting himself to work at his best, while saying to himself that he is inferior to his task and ready to go the day that one will find that he falls short of it.”¹¹²¹

Van den Steen’s reflections help to understand why Beyens felt that his honour was at risk. First, as a diplomat Beyens felt that his dismissal had to be legitimized by the King personally telling him why he had fallen short of his duties. Instead, Beyens felt that he had been “dismissed like a domestic that no longer pleases.”¹¹²² Diplomats did not see themselves as courtiers who had to endure the whims of their princes and fight for the princely favour, but rather as civil servants who wished to uphold the honour and prestige of King and Country. Second, Van den Steen’s reflections state that if asked, the diplomat is ready to go. However, they do not reveal where to. Precisely this royal disregard of the diplomat’s dignity caused Beyens a lot of concern. “One does not offer me any Legation,” Beyens despaired, knowing that this equalled “letting the most odious suspicions float over the victim of such procedure.” Knowing that in times of war, “the most defamatory legends are so easily forged,” Beyens worried about what faults and even crimes “the public” would come to believe that he was guilty of. Moreover, it seemed that his diplomatic dignity would impede him from reacting to the allegations. On the one hand, he argued, doing so would make him “lose in self-respect”, because it entailed exposing the King and creating difficulties to the government. On the other hand, speaking out also had a more practical disadvantage, Beyens explained, “because by getting completely at odds with the King, I would deny myself every chance at obtaining a post, even a bad one, after the war.” Accepting that his own future was “more than compromised”, Beyens swore to his wife that he would devote all his energy towards “preserving of any stain the name that I will leave to our children.”¹¹²³

This concern made the second pill he had to swallow taste extra bitter. The very day that Broqueville informed him about his resignation, Beyens could read in *Le XXe siècle* that the campaign against him had intensified. In his editorial of 12 July 1917, Neuray insinuated

¹¹²¹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 24 March 1917.

¹¹²² In the same letters, Beyens also uses the expression “comme un domestique cassé aux gages”, which holds the connotations of a superior that withdraws his confidence in an inferior, and also of depriving someone of his social functions. See *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, I, 269; and <http://dictionnaire.sensagent.com/casser%20aux%20gages/fr-fr/>.

¹¹²³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 12 and 13 July 1917.

that Beyens, out of desperation and incapability, would not hesitate to conclude a separate peace with the German government and repeated that the Foreign Minister had pursued a pro-German policy for the last two years.¹¹²⁴ “Will they just let that journalist chase after me with his hate because I have not adopted his political ideas?” Beyens despaired in a letter to Hymans. He insisted that he had to demand “that my name does no longer appear in the columns of *Le XXe siècle*, once I have left my functions.” The Foreign Minister had already told this to Broqueville, warning the Cabinet Chief that “if I am cowardly attacked by that journal, I will to my great regret be obliged to defend myself.” All Beyens wanted was silence from the press, and “a plausible pretext” for his departure.¹¹²⁵

This he more or less obtained. The press communiqué that the government issued in late July 1917 stated that “Baron Beyens, Minister of Foreign Affairs, overstrained by the considerable workload that his duties have imposed upon him, sees the need to take some rest, at the risk of irremediably compromising his health.” It also emphasized that the Foreign Minister had asked for his resignation himself, that the government deeply regretted his decision, and that the country owed a great deal of gratitude to “this eminent diplomat.”¹¹²⁶ To his great surprise, Beyens saw that *Le XXe siècle* had published the communiqué without any comments. Pleased with Neuray’s decision, Beyens decided to thank him for his benevolence and sent him a copy of an article that a few months later he would publish in a leading French newsmagazine. “Forced to inactivity in a moment that I find it very difficult not to be able to serve my country”, Beyens wrote in the letter accompanying this gift, “I have tried to make myself useful to the cause of Belgium and its Allies by writing articles.”¹¹²⁷ With the one he sent Neuray, Beyens indeed pursued a practice he had initiated after his return from Berlin in the summer of 1914 and which had led to the publication of *L’Allemagne avant la guerre* and several essays in French journals of ideas. Most likely, Beyens not only wrote them because he considered it to be his moral and professional duty as a Belgian and as a diplomat. He also wrote them to set the record straight and to convince public opinion that he was not the pro-German diplomat some Belgians made of him but, on the contrary, a true patriot. Albeit one whose conception of patriotism differed from that of Belgian nationalists. Beyens’s

¹¹²⁴ NEURAY, Fernand, “La presse emboché de Bruxelles demande une paix qui ne soit pas ‘contre l’Allemagne’”, *Le XXème Siècle*, 12 July 1917.

¹¹²⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul Hymans, 13 July 1917.

¹¹²⁶ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 48, “Communiqué à la presse”, s.d., [Early August 1917].

¹¹²⁷ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 50, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Fernand Neuray, s.d. [Autumn 1917]

publications and his gift tempered Neuray's disposition towards him. Gradually, the journalist came to respect the diplomat's views, so different from his own.¹¹²⁸

Although Beyens, in the weeks after his resignation, did not receive a personal letter from the King, he did receive one from Van den Steen. According to Baron Beyens's son, who again refers to documents he has taken back home from the Foreign Ministry Archives, Beyens was well aware that a resigning Minister was expected to solicit an audience with the King, and had therefore written to Van den Steen. In that letter, Antoine Beyens declares, his father had suggested that the King might prefer postponing the audience to a later date, thus dismissing the sovereign from the tensed situation that their encounter could give rise to.¹¹²⁹ Possibly touched by the diplomat's delicacy, which might have made him think about what dishonour he had inflicted upon his loyal servant, the King ordered Van den Steen to salve Beyens's wounded feelings by writing a "very amiable letter".¹¹³⁰ The soothing words that it contained might have helped Beyens to resign himself to his fate. A few days later, he went to Saint-Jean-de-Luz near Biarritz in order to give credence to the pretext of his dismissal.¹¹³¹

By the time Beyens had reached his destination far away from Diplomatic Island, he will certainly have reflected upon the many events that had transpired since he had accepted the offer of King Albert. As the Ruler of the Belgian resort, Albert had asked him to fight the privateering politicians who threatened to take over the resort. Beyens owed this honour to his position as one of the King's favourites and as one of the House's most eminent inhabitants. Accepting the offer meant upholding the Belgian resort's traditional conduct in its relations with the other resorts of Diplomatic Island. It also meant withstanding the politicians who were trying to take over the Belgian resort and who held very different views about how to interact with the leadership of the other resorts.

Beyens had the advantage that in the Storm that raged over both Diplomatic Island and the Mainland, the Ruler who had invested him with new powers was also the moral leader of the Belgian part of the Mainland, where the politicians actually came from. However, his task

¹¹²⁸ See most notably NEURAY, Fernand, "Une page d'histoire diplomatique de la guerre. La politique du Baron Beyens. Un débat intéressant à propos de la politique suivie au Havre par l'ancien ministre des AE", *La Nation Belge* (formerly *Le XXè siècle*), 17 June 1922 ; and NEURAY, Fernand, *Portraits et souvenirs*, Brussels, 1934, 185-189.

¹¹²⁹ BEYENS, *Un diplomate belge*, 191.

¹¹³⁰ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 18 July 1917. For the letter, see AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 48, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 18 July 1917.

¹¹³¹ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Léon van der Elst to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 20 July 1917.

was seriously complicated by the alliances that these politicians had concluded before and after arriving on Diplomatic Island. On the one hand, travelling towards the island, they had found common ground with journalists sailing, like they were, under the Greater Belgium flag. On the other hand, the arrival of politicians and publicists on Diplomatic Island had shaken the allegiances of several of the Belgian resort's primarily junior inhabitants who were dissatisfied, like they were, with the way that the resort's leadership interacted with leaders of the other resorts. Although the Ruler had let granted him virtually no room for manoeuvre, Beyens started negotiating with the privateering politicians while trying to uphold the Belgian resort's traditional policy. In the meantime, the networks of alliances against him were solidifying and expanding to include a wider range of diplomats, bureaucrats, politicians, and publicists. All these persons strained themselves to compel Beyens to execute their wishes.

The pressure sometimes led Beyens to suggest compromises which he believed both the Ruler and the politicians would accept. This was not the case. Consequently, Beyens eventually lost the confidence of the Belgian resort's Ruler. This loss of favour was bound to seal his fate. It even led to his banishment from Diplomatic Island and as such seriously tarnished his honour. Beyens was succeeded by the Captain of the privateering politicians, who adroitly used his power and wits to convince the Ruler of the Belgian resort that he would respect the traditional ways of dealing with representatives of the other resorts on Diplomatic Island. Moreover, he had convinced the Ruler that he would do a far better job than his predecessor.

The switch that Albert made is remarkable. He had appointed Beyens to keep national politicians away from a domain that traditionally befell to the monarchy, but then let himself be swayed by the leader of those politicians who in a way used premodern techniques of courtly politics to achieve his goals. But did Albert, by allowing Broqueville to take charge of the House, not bring in a Trojan Horse? Perhaps Broqueville's promises to execute the King's wishes were sincere, but did his appointment not open the door to a more active influence of politicians in general on the making and execution of Belgian foreign policy? As to the relations between diplomats and politicians, incarnated in this chapter most prominently in the struggle between Beyens and Broqueville, it seems that diplomats followed their own logic, which included looking for compromises with a lot of care for the honour of the parties involved, while politicians seemed to adopt a more Macchiavellian strategy. By the Summer of 1917, this strategy enabled Broqueville to drive a wedge between the alliance of the King and some of his most loyal diplomats.

CHAPTER 8. THE RESTORATION II: THE KEEPER OF THE CAREER

To Van der Elst, the removal of Baron Beyens came at a particularly inconvenient moment. “We have a lot of concerns,” the Secretary-General confided to Van den Steen, explaining that the “Brazilian government demands the recall of Delcoigne, who is accused of compromising himself with the leader of the opposition Ruy Barbosa, adversary of the government, and of showing very little complaisance for the [Brazilian] Minister of Foreign Affairs.”¹¹³² It regularly occurred that a Belgian diplomat’s lack of deference towards the authorities in his Latin American host country gave rise to difficulties. Most likely, this had to do with the aversion of many Belgian diplomats towards what they often labelled as ‘revolutionary’ regimes. Such sentiments had come to the surface in late 1914, when Paul May had written a letter to the Mexican government in a tone that – as he later had to admit – was “too violent”. In his defence, May invoked the hostility of the new, revolutionary Mexican president Venustiano Carranza, who wanted him gone because of his alleged anti-revolutionary sympathies.¹¹³³

Van der Elst’s concerns point to the fact that Beyens was not only the principal executer of Belgian foreign policy but also the head of the diplomatic personnel. Although he served a King who interfered less than his predecessors in decisions about which diplomats to send where and when to recall them, especially when overseas legations were concerned, in these times of war the Foreign Minister did have to reckon with Albert while making such decisions. He also had to reckon with politicians who wished to have their say or with journalists who made personnel policy recommendations in the press. However, throughout the war Belgian legations in Latin America hardly ever drew the attention of these men. The case of Delcoigne more or less solved itself, when his recall was revoked a few weeks later.

¹¹³² ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Léon van der Elst to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 4 July 1917. Most likely, the Belgian minister plenipotentiary in Brazil had become close friends with Barbosa because of the latter’s passionate pleas for the entry of neutral Brazil into the First World War at the side of the Allies. For Barbosa, see TURNER, C.W., *Ruy Barbosa: Brazilian crusader for the essential freedoms*, New York, 2005. For the Delcoigne case, see also AMBZ, PF 1522, “Adhémar Delcoigne”, Dantas to Barros Moreira, 18 April 1917.

¹¹³³ 1914-1918, n° 293, Julien Davignon to Jules Ingenbleek, 3 November 1914; AMBZ, PF 4853, “Paul May”, Note of Direction P, 27 November 1914; and Paul May to Julien Davignon, 2 December 1917. Eight years earlier, first secretary Robert Everts was involved in a very similar incident. Everts had objected “energetically” against the opening by Mexican customs officer of packages sent to the Belgian legation, admonishing the Mexican Foreign Minister “to give the necessary instructions so that such facts do not occur anymore.” Following Mexican displeasure with Everts’s language, the Political Direction had to acknowledge that “as to the form, he [Everts] had not shown the required respect for the Mexican authorities”, and advised the Foreign Minister to transfer him to Bucarest. See AMBZ, PF 417, “Robert Everts”, Note of Direction P, 1, 15, 16, and 22 February, and 29 May 1906.

Beyens nevertheless insisted that the Political Direction did not sanction Delcoigne. In this way, no trace of the affair could jeopardize his further career.¹¹³⁴ May's recall was never revoked but Beyens did decide to offer him a suitable posting as soon as one had opened up. May thanked the Foreign Minister with all his heart "for the personal part" that Beyens had taken in his nomination.¹¹³⁵

Beyens's reactions to these situations illustrate how, as a diplomat, he manifested a certain corporatist reflex. His prime concern indeed was to grant his former colleagues the possibility to honourably pursue their careers. On the understanding, of course, that such pursuit would not jeopardize the dignity of the diplomatic corps. This chapter looks into the forced career endings of Belgian diplomats under Beyens's ministership with a view to shedding light on the principles of Beyens's diplomatic personnel policy and on the reactions and interactions of diplomats, politicians and journalists to the Foreign Minister's decisions.

§ 1. Safeguarding the Dignity of the Diplomatic Corps

Like Davignon in his final months, Beyens also had to deal with diplomats who did not manage to live up to the requirements of war time diplomacy. Moreover, the antagonism between neutralists and annexationists that the First World War had given rise to within the government and within the walls of the *Villa Hollandaise*, also affected the Belgian diplomatic corps. This posed serious challenges to Beyens's personnel policy.

One of the first decisions Beyens had to take after entering the Foreign Ministry in the Summer of 1915 concerned the career of Albert Garnier-Heldewier, then minister plenipotentiary in Bulgaria. Apparently, the diplomat who had complained a few years earlier that the Belgians only became patriots when they had enough beer in their bellies, had started to neglect his patriotic duties himself. He hardly sent any dispatches, had no contact with the Bulgarian Foreign Minister, and not even with his colleagues.¹¹³⁶ As Political Director, Baron de Gaiffier had felt obliged to implicitly suggest to Garnier that he best offered his resignation. Garnier, however, feigned not to get the message. This, Gaiffier argued, forced the Foreign Ministry to take a measure "which in our patriarchal administration has always been very exceptional and casts a slur." According to the Political Director, Garnier had chosen himself to live in isolation from both the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry and the Allied

¹¹³⁴ AMBZ, PF 1522, "Adhémar Delcoigne", Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Ludovic Moncheur, 16 July 1917.

¹¹³⁵ AMBZ, PF 4853, "Paul May", Paul May to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 28 March 1917.

¹¹³⁶ AMBZ, PF 122, "Albert Garnier-Heldewier", Albert Garnier-Heldewier to Julien Davignon, 7 June 1915

members of the diplomatic corps: “Mr Garnier does not try to meet with them, lives separately in a hotel, and only deals with persons who do not have any authority nor influence in the country.” Was this how Garnier conceived what representing a neutral country in times of war meant? Gaiffier did not think so: “Mr Garnier has led the same life in Tanger and in the postings where he was advisor or secretary. This diplomat is certainly intelligent, but he does not impose himself any sacrifice in terms of money, activity, or work. He lets himself go in a nonchalance that is incompatible with the accomplishment of his duties. He is not suited for the foreign service, does not fulfil his duties, and is not capable of defending the interests that are his to protect.” Gaiffier therefore proposed to remove Garnier from active service “until the end of the war.”¹¹³⁷

Before concluding his letter to the Foreign Minister, Gaiffier had already stated that “the Political Direction continues to believe that Mr Garnier does not have the qualities to represent his country abroad.” In peace time, however, when Garnier had reached the rank of minister plenipotentiary after twenty-two years of service in European postings – apart from one year in Washington and three in Tanger –, such lack of competence did not impede the pursuit of a diplomatic career and had little effect on a diplomat’s career pace. Yet it should in times of war, Gaiffier seemed to argue, implying that Garnier’s refusal to spend money and engage in professional activities for the benefit of his country, justified taking away the rewards that the diplomatic career had to offer. At least temporarily, for the Political Director was too much a diplomat himself not to leave open the possibility for Garnier to honourably pursue his career after the war.

For the moment, however, it was up to Beyens to decide about Garnier’s professional future. The Foreign Minister seems to have made an effort to avoid inflicting the blame that Gaiffier had reluctantly suggested, and was helped by external events as Bulgaria chose to join the war on the side of the Central Powers in September 1915. Throughout the war, Garnier was “maintained in active service despite the suppression of the posting he occupied.”¹¹³⁸ In the early 1920s, Edmond Patris would blame Beyens for not having acted more firmly against Garnier’s professional inadequacy.¹¹³⁹ This journalist might have preferred the way Broqueville pushed senior diplomats out at the end of the Davignon era.

¹¹³⁷ AMBZ, PF 122, “Albert Garnier-Heldewier”, Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, s.d. [early Summer 1915].

¹¹³⁸ ADCB, 1921, 159-160.

¹¹³⁹ PATRIS, Edmond, “Une Ambassade princière à Sofia en 1915. Comment la Bulgarie entra en guerre contre les Alliés”, *Le Soir*, 19 September 1922.

Beyens indeed had very different ideas about the career ends to reserve for men who, like himself, counted several decades of service to King and Country.

The case that the Foreign Minister had to decide upon a year and a half later, sheds some light on how diplomats of Garnier's generation themselves perceived their duties in times of war. On Christmas Day 1916, Baron Beyens informed the King that the Council of Ministers had complained about Emmanuel Havenith, who allegedly was no longer up to his task. These complaints were exaggerated, Beyens objected, admitting nonetheless that the increased importance of the Belgian Legation in Washington required a highly energetic diplomat. Knowing that Albert particularly favoured Emile de Cartier de Marchienne, whom the King had even wanted to send to Paris four months earlier, the Foreign Minister proposed Cartier for Washington.¹¹⁴⁰ Beyens will also have been well aware that sending a diplomat to the United States from Beijing, where Cartier occupied the position of minister plenipotentiary, would offend senior diplomats less than sending him straight to Paris. The King gladly accepted the appointment of Cartier, but did not like the procedure. Via Van den Steen and Van der Elst, he let Beyens know that "nominations of diplomats ... are to be debated between the Foreign Minister and the King," and that "it is abusive that the Council deals with them." One of the reasons that Albert had imposed Beyens as Foreign Minister was indeed to regain control over important diplomatic personnel issues. Although Van den Steen (and Beyens probably as well) certainly agreed with the King's views, it took the former some effort to persuade Albert that it would be better not to make observations to the Council of Ministers in this regard.¹¹⁴¹

Of course, this did not change anything for Emmanuel Havenith. At the outbreak of war, Havenith's career counted more than twenty-three service years, fifteen of which he had spent outside of Europe. As such, his prospects for a prestigious posting would have been bright, were it not for the events of August 1914. In his study of Belgian propaganda in the United States during the First World War, Michaël Amara passes a harsh judgment on the capacities of Havenith to fulfil the changing duties that wartime diplomacy in neutral countries had brought about. Amara describes Havenith as an "old school diplomat" who did not have the qualities nor the will to undertake propaganda activities. The diplomat hardly ever left his legation and assumed a dogmatically reserved attitude. Havenith rarely spoke in public, Amara continues, and refused to sign any propaganda document, for fear of

¹¹⁴⁰ AMBZ, PF 147, "Emmanuel Havenith", Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert of Belgium, 25 December 1916; AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 23, Albert of Belgium to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 21 August 1916.

¹¹⁴¹ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 10 January 1917.

compromising himself. Moreover, from the summer of 1916 onwards, he spent most of his time in a countryside villa at more than two hundred kilometres from Washington, in order to recover from illness. Conducting propaganda at the Belgian legation, Amara concludes, meant occasionally inserting of a few laconic statements in the national press.¹¹⁴² Given that Amara drew these findings almost exclusively from letters written to Broqueville by Louis de Sadeleer, who as parliamentarian and Minister of State was sent to the United States to win American support for the Belgian cause, the allegations they contained might have been a little exaggerated. Both the sender and the recipient of these letters indeed felt some aversion towards the lack of industriousness and the ultra-neutralist stance of some senior members of the Belgian diplomatic corps. Both also had ambitions in diplomacy themselves. While Broqueville aspired to negotiate the future peace treaty in the name of his country, de Sadeleer revealed his ambitions by publishing articles in American newspapers signed “A Belgian Diplomat”.¹¹⁴³ Although Beyens seems to have known where the criticisms came from, he had to acknowledge that there was some truth in them. He therefore let Havenith know that his offered resignation was requested.¹¹⁴⁴

Upon receiving the Foreign Minister’s letter, Havenith immediately started composing a dossier containing documents that had to support his case. He sent this dossier to Beyens, and accompanied it with a long letter justifying his actions. To be sure, Havenith did not refuse to resign; he wanted to contradict “the opinion that I have neglected my duty towards my country in the darkest hours of its distress.” In his defence, the diplomat invoked the limited personnel of the legation, which had increased the workload to such an extent that his health had started to suffer from it. Yet, Havenith continued, despite his illness he had taken his propaganda activities seriously. This was not easy, he explained, for in the United States “Belgian neutrality was hardly understood by the great public.” The method that Havenith followed “consisted in always leaving to the Americans themselves to direct the movement of opinion.” Havenith stressed that he wanted to guide public opinion instead of forcing it, and that he aimed at creating an American press campaign “and then disappear”. The American public, Havenith claimed, could not be told what to think by foreigners but could only be informed. It would then make up its mind itself. “I have always only had eye for the cause of

¹¹⁴² AMARA, “La propagande belge”, 180-181.

¹¹⁴³ AMARA, “La propagande belge”, 183.

¹¹⁴⁴ AMBZ, PF 147, “Emmanuel Havenith”, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Emmanuel Havenith, 4 January 1917.

my country,” Havenith insisted, explaining that he believed to serve that cause best “by effacing myself and by replacing myself by a purely American group.”¹¹⁴⁵

Havenith’s interpretation of his professional duties seems to illustrate the theory of diplomatic practice developed by the anthropologist and political scientist Iver Neumann. In his ethnographic study of Norwegian diplomats, Neumann claims that to be a diplomat essentially means to constantly juggle three conflicting scripts of the self. In addition to the ‘bureaucratic’ script, which tells diplomats to assure the smooth running of daily affairs at the embassy, Neumann identifies the script of the self-effacing mediator and the heroic script. While according to the latter, diplomats can make their mark and achieve greatness, for themselves as well as for the common good, the former essentially involves diplomats incorporating a mediating function to such an extent that they do not make a move unless it is deemed necessary by those on behalf of whom they mediate.¹¹⁴⁶ Neumann also suggests that the interpretation of these scripts differs from time and place, and that in times when communication was slow and difficult, mediation was facilitated by indirect governance, which in the case of diplomats meant fostering a mentality and a code of behaviour based on loyalty and standardized action.¹¹⁴⁷

For many senior members of the Belgian diplomatic corps, the country’s foreign policy of neutrality had determined what loyal behaviour and standardized action involved. From Havenith’s letter of defence, it becomes clear that decades of executing the diplomacy of a neutral country had granted the self-effacement aspect in the script of the self-effacing mediator such a dominant position that it largely determined the half-hearted way that Havenith sprung to action when the First World War set in motion a propaganda campaign for the favour of international public opinion. Havenith’s letter implicitly stated that, as a diplomat, reticence was still the attitude he had to adopt. After all, did Belgium not continue to cling onto its neutrality? Although Havenith wrote very little about the more proactive and anti-German propaganda undertakings of de Sadeleer, he certainly did not condemn them. Like Count Werner van den Steen de Jehay had praised the activities of Jules Destrée and his fellow parliamentarians in Italy, also Havenith seems to have accepted that Belgian politicians were not bound by self-effacement and could fully act according to a more heroic script.

¹¹⁴⁵ AMBZ, PF 147, “Emmanuel Havenith”, Emmanuel Havenith to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 21 March 1917.

¹¹⁴⁶ NEUMANN, “To Be a Diplomat”, *International Studies Perspectives*, 6/1, 2005, 72-93 at 90. See also NEUMANN, *At Home with the Diplomats. Inside a European Foreign Ministry*, Ithaca and London, 2012, 94-128.

¹¹⁴⁷ NEUMANN, “To Be a Diplomat”, 72 and 86.

Beyens seems to have felt some sympathy for Havenith's point of view. He thanked the diplomat for the services he had rendered to the country, and promised him that these would be taken into account when another posting opened up for him.¹¹⁴⁸ At the same time, Beyens will not have regretted seeing Emile de Cartier de Marchienne taking the control of Belgian propaganda in the United States firmly into his own hands. It indeed appears that Cartier preferred following the heroic script in the execution of Belgian foreign policy. Referring to Norwegian diplomats at the turn of the twenty-first century, Neumann lists some of the actions described in this script: "to found a new station in conditions of particular hardship, to undertake a particularly arduous fact-finding mission, or to mastermind and stage a *fait accompli* in a political setting."¹¹⁴⁹ Representing Belgium in the United States in 1917 required slightly different undertakings, but the same proactive behaviour. Whereas Amara qualified the diplomatic activities of Havenith as insufficient, he praised the "great talent" of Cartier. Before Cartier's arrival, Amara notes, propagandists had successfully depicted "Poor little Belgium" as a martyr of German atrocities. Yet after the United States had entered into the war on the side of the Allies, the Belgian propaganda office judged it more effective to alter this image into a vital Belgium that heroically fought on the side of the Americans. Cartier fully agreed. To obtain this goal, he launched several press campaigns in both national and local newspapers, urged the Belgian consuls in the United States to take a more active part in influencing American public opinion, and ran from one society event to the other to win elite support for the Belgian cause. "This intense activity," Amara rightly argues, "broke with the traditional reserve of Belgian diplomats and allowed our [Belgian] propaganda to experience a considerable development."¹¹⁵⁰

Although Havenith's junior by only a few years, Cartier clearly belonged to another crop of diplomats, namely that which Orts labelled the Congo generation.¹¹⁵¹ He had never been cut out for self-effacement, and had always taken a very active part in promoting Belgium's interests abroad. As a junior diplomat before the First World War, Cartier had made his mark in the service of Leopold II's colonial ambitions, fiercely protecting Belgium's

¹¹⁴⁸ AMBZ, PF 147, "Emmanuel Havenith", Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Emmanuel Havenith, 2 May 1917.

¹¹⁴⁹ NEUMANN, "To Be a Diplomat", 74.

¹¹⁵⁰ AMARA, "La propaganda belge", 191-193.

¹¹⁵¹ Although Cartier never seems to have made any explicit comments about his own foreign policy preferences, he seems not to have approved the neutralist foreign policy that Beyens was conducting in consultation with the King. In early October 1917, after Beyens had left Le Havre, Cartier congratulated Pierre Orts with his nomination as Secretary-General. "You are the right man in the right place," Cartier wrote, adding that "and if the old friend that I am rejoices in your successes, that ardent patriot that I am, too, is gratified at seeing the Secretariat-General pass in your hands." See AMBZ, PF 62, "Emile de Cartier de Marchienne", Emile de Cartier de Marchienne to Pierre Orts, 6 October 1917.

interests in the Boxer Uprising. This, as we have seen, led him to become the youngest diplomat by far to ever earn the Knighthood in the Order of Leopold. After the revolt of the Boxers, who destroyed the residence that housed the Belgian legation, Cartier had building materials shipped from Belgium to build a new legation after the model of the *château* in Marchienne where he grew up.¹¹⁵² The majestic building stated claims of Belgian prestige and superiority in a more effective manner than words could have done. It was no coincidence that Cartier's first posting as head of legation was China, where representing Belgium had long involved furthering the Congo Free State's foreign policy.¹¹⁵³ During the war, Cartier was still heading the legation in Beijing. In a letter to Baron Beyens, he complained about the lack of solidarity between the representatives of the Allied Powers, who still quarrelled "in a chauvinistic and narrow-minded spirit" over local interests, like they did before the war. "Everything here is blurred, muddled, confused, contradictory and disparate, in short a true salad," Cartier wrote, promising that he would try "to be the oil and to soften the vinegar that it is so copiously perfused with."¹¹⁵⁴ Upon his arrival in Washington, Cartier made it clear to Beyens that "the attitude of effacement assumed by my predecessor has been poorly received," and that he would "set things straight" by forcing up propaganda activities centred on convincing the Americans that "bravery and working spirit still exist at home, despite the martyrdom that we endure."¹¹⁵⁵

§ 2. Trouble With the Dean

In matters of incidents with diplomatic personnel, most of Baron Beyens's attention was directed towards the Belgian legation in Paris, where the position of Baron Paul Guillaume became increasingly untenable. Already in December 1915, Beyens confided to his wife that "Guillaume by himself causes me more worries than the whole Belgian diplomatic corps together."¹¹⁵⁶ Remarkably enough, this had little to do with Guillaume's outspoken desire for Belgian territorial expansion. As we have seen, Guillaume had survived Broqueville's

¹¹⁵² BAEKELANDT, Frans, "Het kasteel van Marchienne in China", *Bulletin van de vereniging van de adel van het Koninkrijk België vzw*, 252, 2007, 45-55.

¹¹⁵³ CLAEYS BOUUAERT, *Le Baron Emile de Cartier de Marchienne*, 12-157.

¹¹⁵⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 51, Emile de Cartier de Marchienne to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 21 March 1916.

¹¹⁵⁵ AMBZ, PF 62, "Emile de Cartier de Marchienne", Emile de Cartier de Marchienne to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 2 May 1917.

¹¹⁵⁶ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 44, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 17 December 1915.

manoeuvre to oust him almost a year earlier. Under Beyens's Foreign Ministership, he would live through one crisis but succumb to another.

WikiGermans

The first one burst out when Beyens had just moved into the *Villa Hollandaise* in the Summer of 1915. Soon after German military officials had occupied the buildings of the Foreign Ministry in Brussels, they found loads of jackets containing all the political correspondence that Belgian diplomats had sent to the Foreign Minister since 1905. They published in several languages over a hundred letters that, in the decade before 1914, had been sent from legations in London, Paris and Berlin to Brussels.¹¹⁵⁷ The project fit in with the tendency of most belligerent countries to publish a selection of their diplomatic correspondence in order to argue that they were not to blame for the outbreak of war.¹¹⁵⁸ With the publication, the government in Berlin had wished to legitimize the German army's invasion of Belgium: the correspondence of Belgian diplomats would clearly demonstrate, they estimated, that Belgium had not respected the international neutrality that the country was bound to observe. However, no traces were found of secret alliances between Brussels and the capitals of the Entente. Moreover, the publishers had to acknowledge that "when taking account of the sympathy that the Belgian people feel for the Western powers, sympathy that reveals itself particularly in the hostility that the entire Belgian press has always shown towards Germany, it is all the more remarkable that the letters of the Belgian diplomats contain a crushing pile of charges against the Entente powers, as large as one would never have figured."¹¹⁵⁹ German authorities were surprised that the opinions of Belgian diplomats did not reflect those expressed in Belgian newspapers. Since several decades, pro-German sentiments had indeed loomed largely within Belgian diplomatic circles. All conservative monarchists, Belgian diplomats were more sympathetic to Imperial Germany than to Republican France.¹¹⁶⁰

Baron Beyens knew other reasons why Belgian diplomats tended not to adopt anti-German views. In a letter – which he eventually decided not to send – to a consul in neutral Switzerland, where the Belgian government supported pro-Belgian publicists, Beyens wrote that "Belgium's representatives abroad had, in diverse degrees, confidence in the pacifism of

¹¹⁵⁷ STENGERS, "Le cas de la Belgique", 38.

¹¹⁵⁸ Belgium also participated in this tendency. See for instance MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES, *Correspondance diplomatique relative à la guerre de 1914 (24 juillet-29 août)*, Paris, 1914; and ID., *Livre gris belge. Correspondance diplomatique relative à la guerre de 1914-15*, Bern, 1915.

¹¹⁵⁹ *Uit de Belgische archieven, 1905-1914. Berichten der Diplomatieke Vertegenwoordigers van België te Berlijn, Londen en Parijs aan den Minister van Buitenlandsche Zaken te Brussel*, Berlin, 1915, 1.

¹¹⁶⁰ COOLSAET, *België*, 187-188.

the Emperor G[uillaume = William II of Germany].” Most confident in the pacifism of the German emperor, Beyens continued, was Jules Greindl, who was named in Berlin at about the same time as William II mounted the throne. According to Beyens, Greindl kept believing in the image of a thoroughly pacifist Emperor, and had shared these impressions with a generation of young diplomats “for whom he was the oracle because of his eminent qualities.” Beyens also stressed that William II had indeed been a pacifist for a long time, and only converted to bellicosity in the last years before the war. To justify the mistrust towards the Entente powers that the heads of Belgium’s top legations manifested in the published documents, Beyens explained that these were inspired by the diplomats’ fear that such alliances would only lead to war and thus threaten the existence of their beloved fatherland. The anxiety of Belgian diplomats for the survival of their country received further nourishment by “the often imprudent language of the press in both hostile camps”, Beyens added. Most importantly, however, the German authorities had only published those letters that served their purpose, that is of putting the blame for the war on the Allied Powers. Beyens indeed felt confident to assert that other letters from the same diplomats, amongst whom he ranked himself as minister plenipotentiary in Berlin before the war, would reveal their alertness to Germany’s “hidden intentions and aggressive mentality”. In any case, Beyens concluded, “it is not in the reports discovered in Brussels that the Germans will find a justification for their odious conduct towards Belgium.”¹¹⁶¹

That had indeed been the initial purpose of the German initiative. Yet despite its failure, Beyens felt the necessity to set up an investigation to find out how it had happened that these reports had been left behind in Brussels. He might have known that already in 1893, Arendt had typed up a one-hundred-page scenario of what to do in case one of the neighbouring countries invaded Belgium. The sections of this document which dealt with the archives of the Foreign Ministry had been heavily debated and specified over the next two decades. By the end of July 1914, all boxes containing the Ministry’s most important documents, such as the political correspondence of the Foreign Minister with Belgian heads of mission in the countries that guaranteed Belgium’s independence, had been marked with a red dot, and put on board of a ship in the Antwerp harbour. At least, that was what the officials of the Department believed.¹¹⁶²

¹¹⁶¹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Georges Stadler, s.d. [September 1915].

¹¹⁶² AMBZ, Classement B 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Document ‘Mobilisation civile’ by Léon Arendt, 19 July 1893, Léon Arendt to Jules van den Heuvel, 22 February 1905; Note of Direction P, 26 February 1898, 11 and 31

In reality, the most important documents had been overlooked. In the notes that Beyens received from the Foreign Ministry's different Directions in late July and early August 1915, he could read how no functionary was able to provide a satisfactory answer, and how each of them passed the buck to another Direction.¹¹⁶³ Also Beyens's predecessor felt the need to react. Davignon felt particularly troubled, and expressed his worries about his and the Foreign Ministry's reputation in a series of letters to Van der Elst. "It is certain that the affair will one day be debated in the Chamber," Davignon feared.¹¹⁶⁴ Although this prediction would not materialize, the episode would provoke intense debates in the press after the war.

During the war, the archives question was sometimes stirred up in the most radical nationalist media, such as Jules Claes's *La Métropole* and Louis Dumont-Wilden's weekly *La nouvelle Belgique*. Their journalists openly put the blame on the Secretary-General for having allowed these precious documents to end up in German hands. By means of these accusations, they foremost wanted to destabilize the position of the neutralist and allegedly Germanophile Van der Elst.¹¹⁶⁵ The pills Van der Elst had to swallow might have tasted a little less bitter by his knowledge that the readership of *La Métropole* and *La nouvelle Belgique* was negligible, certainly in comparison with the number of readers of *Le XXe siècle* and *L'Indépendance belge*, the two most important Belgian newspapers abroad.¹¹⁶⁶ During Beyens's ministership, journalists of these newspapers pronounced no accusations against Belgian Foreign Ministry personnel. Instead, they focused on the role of the German authorities, whom they suggested had tampered with the diplomatic documents.¹¹⁶⁷

Of course, this did not prevent the contents of the published diplomatic documents from spreading. It led Davignon, in a letter to Van der Elst, to express his fear that "our friend G" would "get into trouble with this regrettable adventure."¹¹⁶⁸ If Van der Elst were to have some doubts about the identity of this G, his friend Van den Heuvel soon cleared this up for

January 1906, 19 March 1909, 23 and 28 January, and 3 March 1913; Inventory of the boxes of Direction P put on board of the liner *Princesse Henriette*, 30 July 1914.

¹¹⁶³ See especially AMBZ, Classement B 72/1, "Mobilisation", Note of the Secretariat-General, 30 July 1915; and Note of Direction N, 12 August 1915.

¹¹⁶⁴ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 188, Julien Davignon to Léon van der Elst, 8 August, and 6, 8, and 16 September 1915.

¹¹⁶⁵ ANONYMOUS, "Le bruit se colporte", *La nouvelle Belgique*, 21 August 1915; ANONYMOUS, "Les annoblissements. Un nouveau scandale", *La Métropole*, 1 November 1917.

¹¹⁶⁶ LEROY, *La presse belge*, 8-9.

¹¹⁶⁷ See for instance ANONYMOUS, "Echos. Les publications boches", *Le XXe siècle*, 13 November 1915; ANONYMOUS, "Les mensonges boches", *Le XXe siècle*, 13 November 1915; ANONYMOUS, "En Belgique. Livres de Teutonie", *L'Indépendance belge*, 16 November 1915; TERWAGNE, Dr, "Lettre de Hollande", *L'Indépendance belge*, 18 January 1917; ANONYMOUS, "Une réfutation de plus. Déclaration faite par le baron Beyens, ministre de Affaires Etrangères. La campagne de presse allemande", *L'Indépendance belge*, 14 March 1917.

¹¹⁶⁸ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 188, Julien Davignon to Léon van der Elst, 5 August 1915.

him. “The whole caboodle of the confidential papers of Greindl and Guillaume is regrettable,” he wrote, adding “not so for Belgium, but for the two diplomats, for the former who had too much confidence, and for the latter who is put in a difficult position towards those about whom he has spoken with a frankness without reserve.”¹¹⁶⁹ Since Greindl had retired long before, G could only be Guillaume, who had expressed unfavourable opinions on Poincaré.¹¹⁷⁰ In several of the reports published by the German government, Guillaume had ascribed the popularity of the French President to his cunningly stimulating of French chauvinism and militarism. He had even labelled Poincaré’s presence at the Elysée as “the greatest danger ... for peace in Europe”, because the new President had “awakened the militaristic and chauvinistic instincts of the French people.”¹¹⁷¹

Luckily for Guillaume, different reports reached Beyens that the French government considered the publications devoid of any importance, and that the position of the Belgian minister plenipotentiary remained unaffected.¹¹⁷² Surely, this only really meant that the authorities in Paris did not wish to have the publication lead to a diplomatic incident. In Belgian political circles, however, machinations to have Guillaume removed from the Paris legation resurfaced. This time they came from Hymans, who tried to convince Beyens to send Cartier to the French capital so that Belgium could be represented in Paris by a diplomat who held the thrust of the *Quai d’Orsay*.¹¹⁷³ Probably for the same reasons why he did not act upon a similar suggestion from the King a year later, Beyens opposed the idea.

Towards the end of 1915, still in the wake of the archives crisis, a more challenging threat to Guillaume’s position cropped up. At that time, the president of the Belgian Chamber of Commerce in Paris informed Guillaume that he would deprive him of the Chamber’s honorary presidency, which traditionally befell the head of the Belgian legation. More importantly, he also threatened to have this decision published. As the main reason, the Chamber’s president invoked the insults of the French government contained in the reports of Guillaume that the German authorities had published. Baron Beyens, however, did not believe that. “It is the consequence of the parsimonious way in which Guillaume deals with his compatriots,” Beyens claimed to know, adding “and perhaps also of his maladroitness and his

¹¹⁶⁹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 122, Jules van den Heuvel to Léon van der Elst, 14 August 1915.

¹¹⁷⁰ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 2 October 1915.

¹¹⁷¹ See reports 97, 99, 101, and 110 in *Uit de Belgische archieven*, 248-253, 255-258, and 275-279.

¹¹⁷² Admittedly, one of these reports came from Guillaume himself, see 1914-1918, n° 17, Paul Guillaume to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 3 August 1915. See also AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51, Albert de Ligne to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 3 August 1915; Julien Davignon to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 22 August 1915.

¹¹⁷³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Paul Hymans to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 21 September 1915.

haughtiness.” Beyens wrote to his wife that while he would definitely try to convince the Chamber’s president to abandon the measure, he had not wholeheartedly taken this decision. Despite his success in so doing, the Foreign Minister felt the need to vent his frustrations about the “so little diplomatic” behaviour of Guillaume, whom he believed to have been absolutely in the wrong towards the Chamber of Commerce. This incident, Beyens regretted, came at a particularly bad time, since Broqueville, “who cannot stand him, insists to put an end to his mission.”¹¹⁷⁴

Beyens did not receive much gratitude from Guillaume for safeguarding the diplomat’s position. Quite the contrary, less than two weeks later he had to read a long report in which Guillaume acknowledged that the war would not end with the unconditional defeat of Germany but advised the government nonetheless to demand Dutch Limburg, the Scheldt estuary, and all the other territories that Belgian annexationists claimed. Guillaume did not explain how the government could obtain these lands. “This is just complete incoherence,” Beyens complained to his wife, asking himself “why does he parade this nationalist cockade, after the example of Bassompierre and the fools of Le Havre?” Among the possible explanations, Beyens identified “a misunderstood patriotism” and Guillaume’s desire “to thwart me.” In any case, Beyens knew, “the King will be very displeased.” The Foreign Minister also shared Guillaume’s letter with his colleagues and was not surprised that Renkin and Segers liked it very much.¹¹⁷⁵

Beyens expurged his frustrations by writing a long letter to Guillaume. It read like a long indictment of the annexationists’ machinations, and contained all the complaints that Beyens had made to his wife. It also revealed several of Beyens’s ideas about how a diplomat in these times ought to behave. Claiming not to want to dispute Guillaume’s patriotism, Beyens first blamed him for giving advises to the government that he was not in a position to give. He then pointed to “certain contradictions that surprise me coming from an experienced diplomat.” How could Guillaume think that the Dutch would accept to give up part of their lands? How could he believe in a negotiated peace and at the same time in Belgian territorial expansion? Did he not see that the neutral powers would resent Belgium for expressing such claims? Guillaume’s ideas were merely serving the enemy’s cause, Beyens proclaimed. Explicitly referring to the incident that had almost ended Guillaume’s career, he then stated that “nowadays, Belgian diplomats should not commit the slightest imprudence, as they were

¹¹⁷⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 44, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 12 and 17 December 1915.

¹¹⁷⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 44, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 28 December 1915.

under accusation of having slightly denounced, before the war, the aggressive intentions of the governments of the Triple Entente.”¹¹⁷⁶

Beyens eventually decided not to send this letter. Instead, he asked Gaiffier to pay Guillaume a visit in order to set things straight. Beyens could have easily given in to the pressure coming from both Broqueville and Hymans to have the diplomat removed. In so doing, he would moreover have eliminated an opponent, who as doyen of the Belgian diplomatic corps and minister plenipotentiary at one of the country’s top legations, could easily cause him many sorrows. Yet he did not. The way Beyens dealt with his former colleague and with all the animosity that the latter had caused, constitutes another illustration of the importance he attached to safeguarding the prestige of the diplomatic career, and to providing old diplomats with an honourable career ending, even though he personally believed that they had not earned the position that they occupied.¹¹⁷⁷

The message that Beyens had asked Gaiffier to convey to Guillaume ran along these lines, although it made no mention of the Foreign minister’s personal thoughts about him. Putting Guillaume’s behaviour in a wider chronological perspective, Gaiffier told him that while “both Davignon and his successor” had always strongly supported him, he had to acknowledge that he had not made it easy on them with his demands, his reproaches, and his claims to special treatment because of his age, his situation as doyen, and his services to the state. Gaiffier also pointed out to him that he had shown little gratitude for Beyens’s “courageous and firm attitude” towards the Belgian Chamber of Commerce. The Political Director then drew Guillaume’s attention to the fact that diplomats should not criticize the government’s foreign policy, stating that “even Baron Greindl” would not have dared to talk as he had done. Gaiffier concluded by saying that the Department got tired off Guillaume’s unending requests to be reimbursed for all kinds of expenses.¹¹⁷⁸

Although the list of charges that Gaiffier formulated in Beyens’s name was quite long, the tone of the message suggests that it essentially aimed at picking up the pieces. The Political Director indeed referred to a set of norms and values that Guillaume as a member of the Belgian diplomatic corps was expected to share with Beyens and himself. Being a diplomat was about executing rather than formulating foreign policy, about sacrificing time

¹¹⁷⁶ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul Guillaume, s.d. [January 1916].

¹¹⁷⁷ In the first version of the reply he drafted to allegations from Renkin, who had referred to complaints from Guillaume in a meeting of the Council of Ministers in August 1916, Beyens wrote: “All I can say about Baron Guillaume, is that I would not have appointed him at the posting that he occupies.” He later change this to: “As to Baron Guillaume, I claim to be the best judge of the use of his services and qualities.” See AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 60, ‘Reply to M. Renkin’, 4 August 1916.

¹¹⁷⁸ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 14 January 1916.

and money in the service of the country, about working together with colleagues in an atmosphere of solidarity and equality, and about protecting the reputation of the Belgian diplomatic family against threats coming from the outside world.

Guillaume had understood the message, but retorted by blaming Beyens for not having respected the rules of the House himself. Not only had the Foreign Minister stimulated the reproaches that the president of the Chamber of Commerce had elevated against him, Guillaume claimed, Beyens had also instigated a press campaign to remove him. He was indeed convinced that “journalists would not insinuate every day that I am not in my place if they were not inspired to do so by someone who wants to take it.” According to Guillaume, there existed only two such persons, namely “Baron Beyens and Mr Carton de Wiart.”¹¹⁷⁹

Already in early December 1915, several newspapers had reported that Guillaume was about to retire and would be replaced by Carton. Back then, Guillaume had telephoned to Bassompierre, who could assure him that both Broqueville and Carton himself had solemnly declared that this was absolutely not true.¹¹⁸⁰ Clearly, Guillaume’s suspicion towards Carton had not waned. Following the replacements of Count de Lalaing and Baron d’Erp by persons from outside of the diplomatic career, many senior diplomats indeed continued to keep a weather eye open for politicians who seemed bent on their postings.

Guillaume’s wariness of Beyens’s ambitions might be an indication that he had gotten wind of Broqueville’s initial plans to put Beyens in charge of the Paris legation. Foremost, however, it reveals something about the hierarchy that senior diplomats drew up between different possible occupations, and confirms what Beyens had proclaimed before he took up his functions as Foreign Minister. Both he and Guillaume certainly agreed that heading one of the country’s top legations had far greater value for a diplomat than directing Belgian foreign policy as a member of the government. Partly, this was probably a legacy of previous decades, when the Foreign Minister merely acted as a straw man for the King. In current times the traditional division of power over foreign policy making had been shocked by the claims of politicians. As such, the Foreign Minister had to take part – more than before – in the political game, whose ways many diplomats considered to be below their dignity.

Gaiffier assured Guillaume that, despite his membership of the government, Beyens had not adopted these ways. “Baron Beyens is much too loyal to try to taunt you by insinuations in newspapers,” Gaiffier contended, adding that such actions “would not be very

¹¹⁷⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 14 January 1916.

¹¹⁸⁰ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 4 December 1915.

patriotic.” After Guillaume had repeated his charges against Beyens, Gaiffier subtly advocated that there were other persons from whom he had more to fear when it came to maintaining his posting. However, the Political Director stated, the Department would have his back against any pretenders. Still Guillaume was not convinced. For thirty years he had entertained cordial relations with Beyens, he claimed, “but since his arrival in Le Havre his attitude towards me has changed.” Guillaume illustrated Beyens’s negative disposition towards him with the example of the Foreign Minister’s journeys to Paris, where he negotiated with Cambon without involving him. This had diminished his prestige at the *Quai d’Orsay*, Guillaume complained.¹¹⁸¹

Judging from Guillaume’s reaction, it seems that Gaiffier’s visit to Paris did not produce the effect that Beyens had hoped. On the contrary, Guillaume sought a rapprochement to Beyens’s enemies at the Foreign Ministry via his son Gustave. Bassompierre lent him a ready ear, and heard Guillaume say that Beyens had no intention whatsoever of trying to change the Francophobe image that the French government had of him. Beyens would even exploit this image in order to take his place, Guillaume argued. From Gaiffier, however, Bassompierre had heard that although Guillaume had clearly lost the confidence of the French government, Beyens was about to promise the diplomat that he would support him against the ambitions of Carton.¹¹⁸² It appears that the Foreign Minister send Guillaume a convincing letter containing this message, for he received a reply in which the diplomat expressed his sincere gratitude.¹¹⁸³

The Elimination of Baron Paul Guillaume

However, the restored understanding between Beyens and Guillaume would not last very long. Already in February 1916, startling rumours about Guillaume’s lifestyle had reached the Foreign Minister. By Spring 1916, these rumours threatened to turn into a scandal. Beyens decided to send an examining magistrate to the Belgian legation in Paris, in order to “shed light on the louche relations between the minister and the attaché.”¹¹⁸⁴ The latter was Henry van den Bulcke, a family member of the Department’s former Director of the Chancellery. Van den Bulcke had entered the diplomatic corps not long before the war broke out. In Paris,

¹¹⁸¹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 14 January 1916.

¹¹⁸² SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 16, 17, 21, and 22 January 1916.

¹¹⁸³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51, Paul Guillaume to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 31 January 1916.

¹¹⁸⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 44, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 12 February and 21 March 1916.

he combined his functions of attaché at the Belgian legation with the presidency of the International Ice Hockey Federation.¹¹⁸⁵ Yet the activities of Van den Bulcke, who clearly possessed a captivating personality, did not seem to have ended there. “The scandalmongers, that is the functionaries of my Department who have acquaintances with the employees of the legation,” Beyens explained to his wife, “claim that the ascendant of v.d.B. sprung from the fact that he was his chief’s companion of pleasure, or better yet of debauchery.” The Foreign Minister knew that if this was really true, Guillaume would have to go. “What an ending? What a dishonour also for the Belgian diplomatic corps!” Beyens exclaimed.¹¹⁸⁶ All his efforts to safeguard the dignity of the career threatened to come to nothing.

Yet there was indeed more to it. The so-called scandalmongers at the *Villa Hollandaise* seemed to know better than Beyens what Van den Bulcke had actually gotten up to. They had picked up that the young diplomat had stolen for a total amount of about 700.000 Belgian francs from other diplomats, but also from charitable institutions, and had been seen “gambling and losing” in Monte Carlo. Bassompierre had heard Van der Elst putting the blame of all this on Baron Guillaume. He also claimed to know that this was a manoeuvre “to make the latter a scapegoat in order to take his place.”¹¹⁸⁷ By early April 1916, however, Beyens was informed about the results of the investigation of Van den Bulcke’s dealings. Apparently, the young diplomat had engaged himself in “the commerce of Belgian bank notes at the expense of the State.” By means of the legation’s correspondence, Van den Bulcke had managed to send large amounts of counterfeit money to England and to the Netherlands. If such audacity did not defy all description, Beyens remarked, what to say of Van den Bulcke’s admonishing the government to arrest one of his fellow forgers? “Van den Bulcke is a real crook,” Beyens concluded, “far less excusable than a poor wretch without an education who lets himself be tempted into thievery.” According to the Foreign Minister, two persons other than Van den Bulcke carried the blame for the dishonour that the attaché would bring upon the Belgian diplomatic corps. The first was Davignon, who “had the weakness to let him enter into the diplomatic corps, even though he was not worthy of it.” Already before his appointment to attaché, Beyens explained, it was known that Van den Bulcke had bought and sold diamonds that he had not paid. Also Guillaume carried part of the blame, Beyens found,

¹¹⁸⁵ ADCB, 1913-1914, 136; “1908-1913, Ligue Internationale de Hockey sur Glace”, Website van de International Ice Hockey Federation. <<http://www.iihf.com/iihf-home/history/the-iihf/epochs/1908-1913.html>>, last checked on 7 March 2014.

¹¹⁸⁶ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 44, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 12 February 1916.

¹¹⁸⁷ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 21 March 1916.

for how “had VdB been able to deceive his chief to the extent that he was put in charge of the control of the funds deposited at the legation?”¹¹⁸⁸

While Guillaume refused to accept this point of view, he seems to have realized that the incident indeed meant the end of his long career. At least, that would explain the contents of the twenty-six-page personal letter that he wrote to the King on 9 April 1916, and in which he complained about the treatment that had befallen him. Guillaume claimed not to have deserved to have been kept out of conferences where other Allied countries did allow their residential heads of mission to assist. He also complained that the King had not responded to previous letters in which he had denounced the attacks that he had to endure and had expounded his views about which territories Belgium should demand, fiercely opposing “the project caressed by some” to return to neutrality after the war. “Certain politicians have not forgiven me for my frankness,” Guillaume asserted, adding that these politicians had reproached him with “a guilty incursion upon a domain of high politics that should be no concern of mine”, and had blamed him for “giving lessons to authorized chiefs.” Guillaume then explained that “one has not answered me with a single word, but intermediaries let me know that I was guilty, ... that I had to keep silent.”¹¹⁸⁹

This was a clear reference to how Baron Beyens had acted upon the reports filled with annexationist ideas that Guillaume kept sending him. Beyens had indeed refrained from personally addressing the diplomat, but had sent Gaiffier instead. Remarkably enough, Guillaume labelled his fellow-diplomat of over thirty years as a politician. Even worse, Guillaume judged Beyens to have become the kind of politician that wanted to break down the traditional bound between the King and his top diplomats. “Very soon after his appointment as Foreign Minister,” he argued, “Mr Baron Beyens ... forbade me to ever write a single word to the King.”¹¹⁹⁰

If the King would have been inclined to adopt a benevolent stance towards the country’s most senior diplomat, in a time when Albert himself started regarding his Foreign Minister less as a diplomat and more as a politician, his benevolence would have gradually vanished while continuing to read Guillaume’s letter. The diplomat called “guilty” all those who claimed that Belgium did not aspire to any but financial compensations, arguing that such “unjust words” did not respond to the aspirations of “the healthy part of the country”,

¹¹⁸⁸ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 44, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 3 April 1916.

¹¹⁸⁹ AKP, AE, n° 96, Paul Guillaume to Albert of Belgium, 9 April 1916. Guillaume mentions a letter sent to the King on Christmas Day 1915. The royal archives only possess a similar letter, written in June 1915. See 1914-1918, n° 64, Paul Guillaume to Albert of Belgium, 22 June 1915.

¹¹⁹⁰ AKP, AE, n° 96, Paul Guillaume to Albert of Belgium, 9 April 1916.

and certainly did not exist in “the Belgians worthy of that name.” Moreover, Guillaume continued, they carry with them “a mentality that should make us feel ashamed.” If the King would still not have felt that Guillaume was attacking the royal ideas about Belgian foreign policy, the diplomat made it very clear by stating that “there is no one in Belgium who is worthy of being listened to, if it be the King or the most modest of its citizens, who at the day the peace is concluded, would dare to return to Belgium empty-handed.” Guillaume repeated that he knew very well that “people exist who believe it is wiser, and more conformable to a policy that seems clever to them, to humour our enemies.” According to Guillaume, this was just “bad policy”, because it lacked belief in the victory of the Allies over Belgium’s enemies. What was needed, Guillaume concluded, was a firm alliance with France and Great-Britain, during and after the war.¹¹⁹¹

At a time when the King held fairly opposite views about what constituted bad policy, and three days before Albert had responded affirmatively to Beyens’s question whether he wished “to humour Germany”, Guillaume’s letter amply sufficed to put him completely out of the royal grace. After having been informed of such direct and hard criticisms, it should come as no surprise that the King also left this letter unanswered. Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear if Guillaume’s reproaches were really directed at Albert. To what extent was Guillaume aware of the King’s personal ideas about foreign policy? Could it not be that he was only targeting Beyens, whom many of his fellow annexationists believed to be whispering neutralist ideas in the King’s ear and trying to prevent lucid and courageous policy views from reaching him?

At any rate, Guillaume’s negative sentiments towards Beyens were adroitly stirred up by Broqueville. As Bassompierre noted a few days later after a conversation with Guillaume’s son, the Cabinet Chief had showed himself “very sympathetic to his father” and “very bitter against B[eyens].”¹¹⁹² Broqueville’s machinations contributed to creating a situation in which Guillaume felt wronged by the diplomat who wished to protect his dignity for the sake of the diplomatic corps’ prestige and supported by the politician who had far less regard for the senior members of the Belgian diplomatic career.

Guillaume had the chance to personally vent his frustrations to Beyens, with whom he had a meeting in early May 1916. Of course, the Foreign Minister had not asked Guillaume to see him in order to discuss foreign policy, but rather to hear what he had to say about the Van den Bulcke affair. Beyens reported to his wife that Guillaume refused to assume any

¹¹⁹¹ AKP, AE, n° 96, Paul Guillaume to Albert of Belgium, 9 April 1916.

¹¹⁹² SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 14 April 1916.

responsibility for what had happened, imputing the whole case to the Government, which knew Van den Bulcke's antecedents yet decided to make him attaché anyway. "That's the limit!" Beyens exclaimed, wondering where Guillaume had gotten the nerve to assume such an attitude.¹¹⁹³ For the moment, however, Guillaume could remain at his posting. From Paris, he continued to write letters of complaint to Beyens. One of these, sent four months after his last encounter with the Foreign Minister, eventually finished him. Neither this letter nor Beyens's reply to it has been found. Bassompierre had read them both, though. He relates that after reading Guillaume's letter, Beyens had requested the Political Direction to provide him with Guillaume's long report of December 1915, in which the diplomat had amply formulated his annexationist ideas. According to Bassompierre, whose comments should evidently not be taken at face-value, Guillaume had written a very "courageous" letter that nonetheless contained "no 'accusation' against Beyens." However, Bassompierre added, "Beyens answered that G. having made the 'worst accusation possible' against a minister responsible for our external policy he must expect what follows, i.e. his discharge!..." The Foreign Minister had even attached the Royal Decree that discharged Guillaume from his functions and put him at the disposition of the Foreign Ministry. Bassompierre deeply regretted "this end of our best diplomat's career", claimed to fully understand that the letter that Guillaume had written to Beyens "was the result of a long developed situation which had embittered him as it would have embittered me or anyone."¹¹⁹⁴

Guillaume's Revenge

Bassompierre also sympathized with the very undiplomatic way that Guillaume took his revenge. At the end of August 1916, less than two weeks after the King had signed the decree that ended his career, Guillaume granted an interview to the conservative French newspaper *Le Gaulois*. It contained a very implicit criticism of King Albert that often recurred in Belgian nationalist discourses, and which glorified Leopold II as the King who would have protected the country's interests far better than his successor did.¹¹⁹⁵ If Leopold II had still reigned in 1914, Guillaume stated, "the old King would have jumped to his feet out of indignation with the German threat and I can see from here which spirited rage he would have flown into." Certainly, Guillaume also sang the praises of Albert's firm attitude towards the German

¹¹⁹³ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 44, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 10 May 1916.

¹¹⁹⁴ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 11, 26, and 31 August 1916.

¹¹⁹⁵ See for instance ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 18.

invasion, but did not ascribe to the current King the same energetic, emotion-driven attitude that most nationalists expected from the sovereign of a nation that needed to grow.¹¹⁹⁶

More pronounced criticisms were directed at the government in general, and at Baron Beyens in particular. The journalist of *Le Gaulois* related that “Baron Guillaume has made no mystery of his recent political dissensions with the Belgian government that have led to his forced retirement, and that he will not talk about, he tells us, out of patriotism.” Of course, this information in itself clearly hinted at part of what the dissension was about. Most of the readers of *Le Gaulois* indeed knew that the official government policy contrasted with the policy of alliance with France that Guillaume advocated. Since the article’s next sentence stated that Guillaume would be replaced by “one of the best collaborators of Baron Beyens”, it was also clear that his dissensions with the government were actually his conflicts with Baron Beyens.¹¹⁹⁷ More importantly, Guillaume weakened Belgium’s international position by putting a conflict between the Belgian government and one of its most important foreign representatives out in the open.

In a similar vein, Baron Guillaume spontaneously started talking about the German publication of the Belgian diplomatic correspondence, vividly denying that his reports contained accusations of French politicians and that their dissemination had deteriorated his relations with these politicians.¹¹⁹⁸ Like Baron d’Erp had done a year and a half earlier in Rome, Baron Guillaume gave an interview in which he deliberately jeopardized the Belgian government’s relationship with a neighbouring country. While d’Erp added tension to relations with the neutral Netherlands, Guillaume did the same for relations with an Allied Power. The French Political Director Pierre de Margerie informed Gaiffier that his government “regretted” the interview, all the more since authorities in Paris had given “word of order to the press not to allude to the Belgian documents.” This lack of coverage had made the whole affair pass into oblivion, Margerie explained, calling Guillaume’s demarche in his conversation with Gaiffier, “such a maladroitness” and even “treason”.¹¹⁹⁹

According to Gaiffier, Guillaume had legitimated his actions by pointing out that the Foreign Ministry had shown a lack of respect towards him as an old servant of the state. Instead of sending a letter, the Secretary-General or the Political Director should have come to

¹¹⁹⁶ GAUCHERAND, F., “A la Légation de Belgique. Conversation avec S. Exc..le baron Guillaume”, *Le Gaulois*, 30 August 1916.

¹¹⁹⁷ GAUCHERAND, “A la Légation”.

¹¹⁹⁸ GAUCHERAND, “A la Légation”.

¹¹⁹⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 1 September 1916; SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 4 September 1916.

Paris to personally and ask him to offer his resignation. Since this had not happened, Gaiffier explained, Guillaume came to regard his expulsion as “a mark of honour that he will proudly pass on to his children.” Yet his greatest preoccupation, Gaiffier added, was to obtain the reimbursement of the storage charges of his furniture.¹²⁰⁰ With this last remark, the Political Director wittily turned the tables on Guillaume, who might have reproached the Foreign Ministry for not paying him the deference that old diplomats were entitled to, but who himself diminished the strength of these claims by asking the state for money instead of tacitly carrying the financial burdens expected from members of the diplomatic corps.

Baron Guillaume’s last feat was a letter he sent to the King in October 1916. It opened stating that “King Leopold willingly acknowledged the literary merits of Baron Beyens, but severely judged other aspects of his character; he accused him of having a false spirit and of never having another goal than his personal interests.” Guillaume then seems to have wanted to make Albert aware that he was not only Leopold II’s successor but also shared the late King’s view on Beyens, adding that “also King Albert had the chance to appreciate these merits of the Foreign Minister: it even led him to withdraw his confidence.” Guillaume’s grudge against Beyens had clearly reached such a magnitude that he solicited the King to discharge the Foreign Minister from his functions. Underlying this desire was his belief that Beyens had violated the code of conduct in his dealings with the country’s leading diplomat. Guillaume had considered it his duty to speak up to the Foreign Minister and to keep defending his ideas about territorial expansion. Yet, Guillaume argued, Beyens did not discuss with him, but merely proposed to the King to expulse him from his position. “I was the dean of the diplomatic corps; one has turned me out of the house like a criminal”, Guillaume explained, repeating his complaint in terms that remind of the way Beyens commented on his own discharge by the King one year later: “I have been dismissed like a lackey that ceased to please.”¹²⁰¹ Beyens had used the word “domestic”, which expressed a similar view of what kind of servitude diplomats believed that their functions did not involve.

The remaining part of Guillaume’s letter appealed directly to the King, and bore other resemblances to how Beyens felt after Albert had dismissed him. Guillaume wrote that he had hoped “that His Majesty would have deigned to write me a few lines to explain to me that certain reasons – of perhaps a political nature – had forced him to accept the procedures of his

¹²⁰⁰ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 23, Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 1 September 1916.

¹²⁰¹ 1914-1918, n° 64, Paul Guillaume to Albert of Belgium, 7 October 1916.

Foreign Minister in my regard, but that he knew that I had never ceased to consciously fulfil my duties and that he did justice to my patriotism, to my zeal, and to my dedication.”¹²⁰²

Guillaume indeed seemed to believe that he had served the interests of King and country the best he could. Yet how could he not have known that his conception of Belgium’s interests was so very different from Albert’s? During the war, Guillaume had nourished close ties with Gaston Barbanson and other Belgian annexationists residing in Paris. Barbanson often expressed his frustration with the King’s foreign policy attitude in letters to Nothomb and Broqueville, calling Albert not only “the great constipated” but also “Constantine”, a reference to the Greek king who was particularly unpopular in Allied circles for his alleged pro-German sentiments.¹²⁰³ If Guillaume would not have known already, Barbanson will certainly have tried to explain to him that the King was on the side of the neutralists. Most likely, Guillaume knew this. However, much more than their fellow annexationists in political and publicist circles, diplomats who advocated territorial expansion continued to regard the King as the only authority that they were answerable to. As for other members of the diplomatic corps, royal approval for their actions seems to have constituted an essential element of their professional dignity. Keeping Albert’s disposition towards Lalaing in mind, Guillaume might have realized that the chances were very slim that he would ever receive a written token of gratitude from the King.

The Gift of Prestige

While the dean of the Belgian diplomatic corps had been awaiting the end of his career, the struggle for his succession was settled without too many difficulties. Politicians like the Carton de Wiart and Jules Destrée had their eye on the Paris legation, but Beyens would certainly not have allowed that the members of the diplomatic career had to endure another humiliation, after the appointment of Hymans at one of the career’s top postings.¹²⁰⁴

Yet this did not prevent speculations about the identity of Guillaume’s successor from flourishing in the Belgian communities of Paris and Le Havre. Bassompierre reported how Beyens and the King had first offered the posting to Count Frédéric van den Steen, who had refused. Then he heard from Nothomb that Broqueville wanted to give the position to one of Belgium’s leading industrialists. Other sources informed him that Beyens would leave the

¹²⁰² 1914-1918, n° 64, Paul Guillaume to Albert of Belgium, 7 October 1916.

¹²⁰³ WILLEQUET, Gaston Barbanson, 338 and 362-363; CLOGG, Richard, *A Short History of Modern Greece*, Cambridge, 1986, 105-110.

¹²⁰⁴ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 122, Jules van den Heuvel to Léon van der Elst, 1 September 1916.

Foreign Ministry for the Paris legation. Eventually Gaiffier told Bassompierre that with the King's approval, Beyens had offered the posting to him. The Political Director had accepted. However, Bassompierre reported, upon hearing this Carton de Wiart "had raised alarm to the place." This had apparently upset Gaiffier to such an extent that "with tears in his eyes", he reproached the annexationists "for betraying him & playing H. Carton's games."¹²⁰⁵

On the one hand, Gaiffier's emotional reaction reveals how much he feared the machinations from 'outsiders' who aspired after top legations. Like many of his colleagues, the Political Director was well aware that the war had severely damaged the relatively smooth roads towards glorious career ends that diplomats had travelled on for many decades. Luckily for Gaiffier, however, under Beyens's ministership the roads had been partly repaired. Gaiffier also had the advantage that the King had not forgotten about Carton's annexationist ideas and had let Beyens and Broqueville know that he refused to accept the Christian Democrat's candidature. That settled the score. At a Cabinet meeting in mid-September 1916, a few Ministers repeated their dissatisfaction with Beyens's prerogative to appoint senior diplomats without consulting his colleagues, but the decision had by then long been taken and opposition quickly faded.¹²⁰⁶ On the other hand, Gaiffier's accusation of betrayal directed at the annexationists aroused the suspicions of Bassompierre, who much to his regret found that his former superior had turned. "Gaiffier does not know if he sides with Beyens or with the other side," Bassompierre remarked at the beginning of a discussion that ended with his finding that Gaiffier's mind "unconsciously follows that of King & Beyens." This was not the only setback that Bassompierre had to cope with. Beyens indeed gave the position of Political Director not to him but to Baron Ludovic Moncheur, who had left the Belgian legation in Istanbul when the Ottoman Empire entered the war alongside the Central Powers.¹²⁰⁷

In the end, the affaire Guillaume turned out fairly well for Beyens. Although he regretted that the end of the career of the country's most senior diplomat had put the prestige of the diplomatic corps at risk, it did provide him with a more loyal work force. Especially Gaiffier would show his gratitude to the Foreign Minister. When Count van den Steen went to Paris in early February 1917, he found Gaiffier to be "a great admirer" of Beyens, and "sincerely devoted" to him. This, he added, was an impartial judgment pleading for Beyens's qualities because in the weeks before, Gaiffier had felt humiliated after the Foreign Minister

¹²⁰⁵ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 22 August 1916.

¹²⁰⁶ ARA, T 029, "Papiers de Charles de Broqueville", n° 375, Procès-verbal of the reunion of the Council of Ministers, 19 September 1916. See also SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 26 August and 20 September 1916.

¹²⁰⁷ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 26 August 1916.

had kept him out of all negotiations about the replies to Bethmann-Hollweg and to Wilson. As Belgian minister plenipotentiary to Paris, Gaiffier should have at least been present at these discussions, Van den Steen specified.¹²⁰⁸ Gaiffier's loyalty to Beyens was all the more remarkable in the light of Bassompierre's comments on the relations between Beyens and the former Political Director. According to Bassompierre, Gaiffier had to endure the belittling remarks from the Foreign Minister until right up to his transfer to Paris.¹²⁰⁹

If Bassompierre's comments were true, Beyens had certainly made amends by appointing Gaiffier to one of the most coveted postings of the diplomatic career. When it became clear, in July 1917, that Beyens would have to leave the Foreign Ministry, one of the most supportive letters he received came from Gaiffier. The former Political Director first praised Beyens's qualities as the leader of Belgian foreign policy. "With you an element of temperance and reason vanishes from the government," Gaiffier regretted, expressing his fear that Beyens's successor would "demand compensations that the Allies will not grant us." It appears that almost a year after his appointment in Paris, Gaiffier had fully accepted Beyens's point of view in terms of Belgian foreign policy. Gaiffier also thanked the Foreign Minister that he had granted him "the great honour" of counting him amongst his friends. "More than anyone have I experienced the effects of your friendship," Gaiffier stated, conceding that "to you alone I owe ... my appointment to a posting that is the object of avidity in every way." As such, Gaiffier concluded, "I will always feel towards you the most profound gratitude for the affective attention that you have shown for me."¹²¹⁰

In cultures where honour pervaded the relationships between individuals, gift-giving ranked among the strongest means to exteriorize bonds of friendship. By appointing him to the Paris legation, Beyens had offered Gaiffier the most cherished gift that a Belgian diplomat in the First World War could possibly receive. As Gaiffier's reflection on his nomination suggests, gifts carried with them the notion of reciprocity. In early modern times the gift, as Luuc Kooijmans has keenly defined it, was "a token of affection, of good will, (...) When the receiver gratefully accepted it, he declared himself explicitly or implicitly obliged, meaning that he could be solicited, that in due course he was prepared to return the gesture with a

¹²⁰⁸ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 6 February 'soir' 1917.

¹²⁰⁹ See for instance SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 10 and 21 March, 1 May, and 29 July 1916.

¹²¹⁰ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 48, Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 18 July 1917.

service or a favour.”¹²¹¹ Whereas in the world of politics, early modern times had been long gone, many of its customs and values still pervaded the interactions between the inhabitants of Diplomatic Island. Arguably more than on the Mainland, here gift exchange still generated power differentials. When recipients could not reciprocate a received present, they were to adapt to the hierarchical situation by accepting its legitimacy.¹²¹² Gaiffier did not have the power to return the favour, and acknowledged the consequences of this situation in his answer to a letter that he received from Beyens the next day. Gaiffier stated that “if you had placed your candidacy for Paris while offering me the posting of London, I would have been happy to comply with such an arrangement because I appreciate your merits and your superiority and also because I owe my current situation to your kindness alone.”¹²¹³

As Gaiffier’s letters to Beyens show as well, gifts also conferred honour, providing tangible evidence of one’s status and legitimizing one’s membership of a social community.¹²¹⁴ Gaiffier implicitly referred to this function of gifts by opposing Beyens’s friendly behaviour to the dealings of the politician who most coveted the honour that the former Foreign Minister had bestowed upon him. “This cannot be said of M. [Carton] de Wiart who has nourished bitterness for not having been named in 1916 and who does not cease to scheme, not to me personally but with a view to creating a favourable atmosphere”, Gaiffier found, expressing his doubt “that the King favours the personal ambitions of C[arton].”¹²¹⁵

In these comments, Gaiffier inserted – consciously or not – a value that Baron Beyens considered of paramount importance. When the Ruler of the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island had invested him with the vicarious leadership of Belgian diplomacy, Beyens knew that this entailed more than negotiating with privateering politicians and with representatives of the other resorts. It also meant concerning himself with people management in the Belgian resort. In this capacity, Beyens’s main concern was to safeguard the dignity and prestige of the House’s inhabitants and their way of life. On the one hand, Beyens tried to do so by making efforts to grant honourable career endings to the senior inhabitants, even if they had

¹²¹¹ KOOIJMANS, Luuc, *Vriendschap en de kunst van het overleven in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw*, Amsterdam, 1997, 137.

¹²¹² ADLOFF, Frank, “Beyond Interests and Norms: Toward a Theory of Gift-Giving and Reciprocity in Modern Societies”, *Constellations*, 13, 2006, 411, 413, and 415.

¹²¹³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 48, Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 19 July 1917.

¹²¹⁴ ADLOFF, “Beyond Interests”, 413.

¹²¹⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 48, Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 19 July 1917.

proven themselves incapable of meeting with the challenges of working in stormy circumstances. On the other hand, Beyens did his best to protect them against the ambitions of the privateering politicians, even if the ones who needed protecting did not always share his opinions about how to live through the Storm. Since the Ruler of the Belgian resort had never before made one of the House's inhabitants into the hierarchically superior of his peers, this was not an easy task. However, there existed a common set of norms and values and a certain code of behaviour which were more or less accepted by all of the House's inhabitants. This at least facilitated interaction, although misunderstandings could never be excluded. After the ruler of the Belgian resort had sent Beyens away from Diplomatic Island and invested the Captain of the privateering politicians with the power to vicariously lead the resort, these norms and values and this code of conduct would become subjected to great pressure.

CHAPTER 9. THE CONSULATE

In a letter to Van der Elst written in late July 1917, just days before he officially left the Foreign Ministry, Beyens expressed his worries about the future of both Belgian diplomacy and the country's diplomats. "And the old house, to which I am so attached, which transformations will it not have to undergo!" he exclaimed, regretfully finding that it might have turned out otherwise if two years earlier he had not accepted to lead the Department. Beyens also claimed to be curious about "what our Prime Minister and his gang are going to try in order to justify the change of course in our foreign policy." The diplomat was indeed convinced that Broqueville's taking over the Foreign Ministry would mean that the country would actively pursue its territorial aspirations. Yet, Beyens knew, "the wind is not blowing towards annexations."¹²¹⁶

This chapter will investigate to what extent Beyens's fears materialized during the less than five months that Broqueville led the Foreign Ministry. The first section will deal with the reorganization of the Department's domestic and foreign services. Central questions here are how the arrival of Broqueville altered power relations within the Foreign Ministry and how Belgian diplomats perceived and reacted to these challenges. Of course, these issues are connected to the way in which the Cabinet Chief, sometimes independent from his collaborators, tried to achieve his foreign policy aims and how these activities related to international conceptions of what diplomacy should be. As Beyens suggested in the aforementioned quote, the Belgian territorial claims would receive a cold welcome in both London and Paris and also winds coming from other parts of the world were not blowing in the direction that the annexationists wanted. The second half of 1917 was indeed decisive in the wider international acknowledgment that what was then labelled 'old diplomacy' and which involved secret negotiations to obtain annexations and the establishment of spheres of influence, should be replaced by the so-called 'New Diplomacy'. This kind of foreign policy making advocated public scrutiny in press and parliament as its method and self-determination of the peoples as one of its most important aims.¹²¹⁷ The second section of this

¹²¹⁶ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 177, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 28 July 1917.

¹²¹⁷ MAYER, Arno J., *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918*, New Haven, 1959, 1-58. For a critical view on the use of these terms, see SOFER, Sasson, "Old and New Diplomacy: A Debate Revisited", *Review of International Studies*, 14/3, 1988, 195-211; and WEISBRODE, *Old Diplomacy Revisited*, 13-29.

chapter will look into how Broqueville and his Ministry executed Belgian foreign policy in these changing international conditions.

§ 1. Transforming the Old House

The Rise of the Young Ones

In a letter to Van der Elst written in early August 1917, Beyens addressed the issue of the changes that Broqueville would push through among the domestic personnel of the house that he was so attached to. The fact that the Cabinet Chief had taken Orts to a diplomatic conference in Paris, Beyens believed, “clearly indicates that he will be the inspiration of the policy of the new Foreign Ministry.” Orts would be offered a high position, and Van der Elst, so Beyens feared, would soon enough know which position that would be.¹²¹⁸

Orts indeed became the new Secretary-General, a function he would combine with that of *chef de cabinet* of the Foreign Minister. There exists some historiographical discussion about how and why the appointment of Orts transpired. Drawing on an undated note in which Broqueville lists Orts as number two of five possible candidates for the Foreign Ministership, Luc Schepens argues that Broqueville promoted Orts in order to better control him. Given that Broqueville put his main adversary Hymans as number one on that list, Schepens’s argumentation is not entirely convincing (although his claim might still be correct). Marie-Rose Thielemans seems to agree with Schepens but adds some nuance by suggesting that the King had actually suggested the manoeuvre to Broqueville sometime in early June 1917.¹²¹⁹ However, in his memoirs Orts uses his wife’s diary to argue that the King had suggested to make him Foreign Minister, not Secretary-General.¹²²⁰ Albert might have made this suggestion in the conviction that Orts’s loyalty to his sovereign as a diplomat would have compelled him to execute the King’s foreign policy rather than his own. Albert, as Bassompierre claims in his diaries, was indeed quite reluctant to accept Orts combining the functions of Secretary-General and those of *chef de cabinet* of the Foreign Minister, which would make him into kind of an undersecretary of state for Foreign Affairs.¹²²¹

¹²¹⁸ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 1 August 1917.

¹²¹⁹ SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 96-97; THIELEMANS, “Albert entre guerre et paix”, 115-117.

¹²²⁰ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 73.

¹²²¹ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 4 August 1917.

Conversely, Jan Velaers and Maria de Waele follow Henri Haag's opinion. The biographer of Broqueville accepts the contention – written down by Orts himself more than twenty years later – that the choice of the young diplomat, who ranked among the country's most fervent annexationists and had affiliations with the Liberal Party, was actually imposed on the new Foreign Minister by his adversaries Renkin and Hymans as a prerequisite for their approval of Broqueville's nomination.¹²²² Given that by late 1917, Hymans had come to favour an alliance policy and was gradually won over for the annexationist cause, this certainly sounds plausible as well.¹²²³ Moreover, the appointment of Broqueville had been preceded by intense political struggles during which Hymans had wished to secure the office of Foreign Minister for a Liberal, and preferably for himself. In the heat of the debate, Hymans had even exclaimed that Broqueville's prime goal was "to acquire a situation of proconsul."¹²²⁴ To counter the concentration of power in the Cabinet Chief's hands, Hymans might have figured, increasing the authority of his good friend Orts over the Department's administration only had advantages.

Most likely, the appointment of Orts materialized due to a combination of different parties each believing that it best suited their goals. Or perhaps Beyens was at least partly right in suggesting that Broqueville had instigated the promotion of Orts because he was not adverse to Belgian territorial expansion. The Cabinet Chief indeed seems to have adopted a personnel policy of removing neutralists and attracting annexationists. That would at least explain what Haag, in his conviction that Broqueville was not an annexationist, finds incomprehensible, namely Bassompierre's promotion to Political Director in August 1917.¹²²⁵ For Bassompierre, this meant that, five years after bumping into a glass ceiling which almost induced him to leave for the Far East, he finally obtained his long-desired position.

In his diaries, he reported that Broqueville called upon Orts and him to discuss "organization of House – also diplomatic corps." Apparently, the new Foreign Minister showed himself extremely amiable, promising to recall Gustave Guillaume (who had left Le Havre after his father had been forced to resign) and to attach Roger de Borchgrave to the Political Direction, so that this diplomat could lend Bassompierre a helping hand.¹²²⁶ Borchgrave was the son of the retired Belgian diplomat Emile, one of the most active and

¹²²² VELAERS, *Albert I*, 331; DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 133; HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 601-602. See also PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 273.

¹²²³ See Chapter Ten. See also SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 15 July 1917.

¹²²⁴ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 183, Léon van der Elst to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 15 July 1917.

¹²²⁵ See HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 602.

¹²²⁶ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 4 and 8 August 1917.

valued contributors to Leopold II's imperial projects and during the First World War one of the very few interviewees in occupied Belgium who had plainly told Capelle that Belgian diplomacy had to work towards the annexation of Zeeland Flanders.¹²²⁷

Of course, we should not let the issue of Orts's promotion completely overshadow the question why Van der Elst had to go. From Broqueville's point of view, this was probably more important. Ever since Albert had ascended the throne Van der Elst had acted as his confidant and had become an adviser whom he heavily relied on. Through his correspondence with Van den Steen, the Secretary-General kept in close contact with the King. As both Thielemans and Haag have observed, throughout the war years Broqueville had constantly endeavoured to have royal confidants removed from De Panne.¹²²⁸ In Chapter Seven, we have seen that this strategy, which reminded of practices common in early modern courts, did not only apply to men who dwelled in the physical vicinity of the sovereign but also to those who had the King's ear outside of the royal residence. In matters of foreign policy, Van der Elst figured very prominently on that list. By removing him Broqueville increased his authority in this domain and indirectly his degree of access to the King as well.

At any rate, Orts and Bassompierre were certainly led to interpret Broqueville's personnel policy as 'annexationist'. Nevertheless, Orts hesitated for a long time to accept the offer the Cabinet Chief had made him. According to Bassompierre, Renkin had immediately insisted that Orts would accept, telling him "he is a fool if he does not as Br[oqueville] wants him & he is the master of the day." Also Bassompierre and Pierre Nothomb tried to convince their friend.¹²²⁹ Orts decided to explain himself in a letter to Bassompierre. "In order to effectively exercise the action that one expects from me," Orts stated, "it is important that I preserve my independence." He argued that "by stipulating this as a condition, & by formally refusing my cooperation if it is not met, I believe to serve the cause." Orts made it clear that Broqueville had asked him to "collaborate" with him and that this meant that he could not be dependent from the new Foreign Minister. In Orts's view, there was no such thing as collaboration between a Foreign Minister and a functionary of his Department, even if it concerned the Department's number one functionary: "The functionary defends his opinion, if the minister maintains his, the functionary acquiesces. Disagreement does not give him the right to resign. [...] If I would accept to become secr. gl., I would be lost. I would enter the administrative hierarchy, I would have to comply with its rules like tradition has established

¹²²⁷ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 468-469.

¹²²⁸ THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1916-1918", 359; HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 602.

¹²²⁹ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 29 and 30 July and 4, 5, 6, and 8 August 1917.

them and which are rules of honour. Grandeur and servitude!” However, Orts then advanced, there was a solution: “The title of M[inister] plenip[otentiary] attached to the Dep[artmen]t with the functions [of Secretary-General] leaves the meaning of my arrival at the side of the Minister intact. I remain his collaborator, I conserve my liberty: I am heard. As Secretary-G[enera]l, I am forceful.”¹²³⁰

This letter reveals interesting aspects of Orts’s self-perception as a member of the Belgian diplomatic corps. In his opinion, diplomats constituted a civil service corps with a special status: unlike members of the state’s administrative careers, diplomats enjoyed a larger degree of independence vis-à-vis the Minister who led their Departments. The fact that senior diplomats were named Ministers plenipotentiary in a way suggests their equality to members of the government, or so Orts’s underlying reasoning seems to have been. Surely, the opportunity to obtain a promotion to this rank might have also attracted Orts who, apart from a few years in Paris, had spent his entire diplomatic career in Brussels. Moreover, through his promotion he jumped five places on the seniority list. In a conversation with Van den Steen, however, Orts stressed that this had not been his ambition. Van den Steen seemed to believe Orts, but also confided to Van der Elst that he did not approve that “this boy” – who was almost fifteen years younger than him – had been invested with so much authority.¹²³¹

The letter to Bassompierre also reveals that Orts clearly did not trust Broqueville and did not believe that the new Foreign Minister would have his annexationist personnel policy followed by an anti-neutralist and annexationist foreign policy. As Orts remembered in his memoirs, he left his first meeting as Secretary-General with Broqueville “quite flabbergasted”. Referring to the early nineteenth century United Kingdom of the Netherlands, the foundation of which indirectly led to the Belgian Revolution, Broqueville had told him that together they would achieve great things. “We will redo 1815,” he had argued, “but this time it will be Holland that will be under the orders of Belgium.” This complete misconception of Belgian nationalist and annexationist ideologies did not seem to have alarmed Orts, who reassured himself with the thought that Broqueville just came from dinner “and had undoubtedly dined very well.” In the following weeks and months, Orts recalled, the new Foreign Minister hardly ever showed up in Sainte-Adresse, immediately agreed to everything Orts proposed and blindly signed all the documents the Secretary-General asked

¹²³⁰ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, Pierre Orts to Albert de Bassompierre, 5 August 1917. In his memoirs, Orts elaborates further on how he perceived the duties of a state servant. See ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 175-175bis.

¹²³¹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 14 August 1917.

him to approve.¹²³² Together with Bassompierre, Orts seems to have taken advantage of this situation to add several ‘outsiders’ with annexationist sympathies to the personnel of the *Villa hollandaise*. Among these Pierre Nothomb ranked most prominently. He was to occupy himself with “studies and documentation” or in other words, with annexationist propaganda. Orts also employed as his assistants the future Secretary-General Fernand Vanlangenhove and Fernand de Ryckman de Betz, who had authored at least one annexationist pamphlet in addition to many articles published in *Le XXe siècle*. Both of them had signed Nothomb’s 1915 *mémoire des jeunes*.¹²³³

It appears that Broqueville had little to do with these appointments. As it seems, once the Cabinet Chief had made the changes he wanted, he did not care too much anymore for diplomats and bureaucrats. He might have thought that he did not need them for executing the diplomatic activities that he had in mind. It would take some time before those activities came to light.

Kicking the Old Ones Upstairs

While Bassompierre and Orts could probably largely determine amongst themselves which junior personnel to hire, decisions about the fate of the senior diplomats and bureaucrats who had to make way for their promotions had to pass through higher channels. Broqueville had informed Bassompierre that from 11 August 1917 onwards he would be invested with the functions of Political Director.¹²³⁴ This meant that Baron Moncheur had to go. Moncheur, then in the United States on a special mission to the American president Woodrow Wilson, had only been appointed Political Director less than a year earlier, when Beyens had decided to replace Guillaume in Paris with Gaiffier and wanted to avoid leaving the Political Direction in the hands of Bassompierre. Before his appointment, Moncheur had not been particularly close with Beyens. Yet judging from their correspondence in 1916, they did share in the culture and language of honourable state service that many senior diplomats were imbued with.¹²³⁵ After his appointment, the annexationists in the Foreign Ministry came to closely

¹²³² ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 75-76.

¹²³³ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 399, 406, 412, and 451-454; PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 272-273.

¹²³⁴ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, Pierre Orts to Albert de Bassompierre, 4 August 1917; ADCB, 1925, 203.

¹²³⁵ See especially the correspondence concerning Moncheur’s appointment in AMBZ, PF 1226, “Ludovic Moncheur”, Ludovic Moncheur to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 1 and 12 September 1916; Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Ludovic Moncheur, 7 September 1916. See also “VA, AES. Periode III. Belgio. 1904-1922. 81 fascicoli. (VA / 034916 / 191-359.100-180). 271, Rapport van baron François Moncheur over onderhoud met

associate Moncheur with Beyens's policy. In addition to their desire to promote one of their own, that insight certainly ranked among the main reasons why the annexationists wanted him gone. Since Gaiffier had left the Political Direction for the Paris legation, sending Moncheur to a much less prestigious destination would put his honour at stake. As it happened, the Belgian legation in London would soon have to welcome a new chief. Broqueville's appointment as Foreign Minister had indeed incited Hymans to return to Le Havre and take up the office of Minister of Economic Affairs, so as to keep a closer eye on the Cabinet Chief.¹²³⁶

However, the prestigious posting in London was not exactly what Broqueville and his annexationist collaborators had in mind for Moncheur. In mid-June 1917, Count de Buisseret had already informed his ideological friend Bassompierre that his situation as Belgian minister plenipotentiary in Russia came under increasing pressure. According to Buisseret, his adversaries in the Belgian colony in St. Petersburg had seized upon the tensed political climate created by the February Revolution to discredit him. Invoking his "aristocratic condition" and his alleged "lack of dedication", the diplomat claimed, they had even urged King Albert to have him recalled. Buisseret concluded that he understood that his patriotism required his continued residence in the Russian capital but also mentioned that he would certainly not say no to another posting.¹²³⁷ Surely, Buisseret knew that his patriotism also required not to add words like 'provided that this posting is compatible with my seniority'. He might not have deemed such addition necessary either, Bassompierre being perfectly aware of the case in point.

Bassompierre indeed tried to procure Buisseret with the direction of the Belgian legation in London. In this way, one of the country's most important diplomatic postings would go to a Congo generation annexationist. Buisseret indeed opposed neutrality and felt that Belgian diplomacy should work towards persuading the British government to accept Belgian claims on at least Zeeland Flanders.¹²³⁸ However, after Bassompierre had shown Broqueville the telegraphic reply he had wished to send to Buisseret's letter, he noted in his diaries "the telegram to Buisseret is altered a bit. London cannot be promised to him."¹²³⁹ What had led Broqueville to oppose sending a pro-Allied and annexationist senior diplomat to the British capital?

president Thomas Woodrow Wilson. 1917", [14 August 1917] url: <
<http://www.vaticana.be/regesten/4760.php#271> > last checked on 28 October 1913.

¹²³⁶ 1914-1918, n° 71, Paul Hymans to Albert de Belgique, 30 July 1917. See also VELAERS, *Albert I*, 247.

¹²³⁷ AMBZ, PF 50, "Conrad de Buisseret-Steenbecque de Blarengien", Conrad de Buisseret to Albert de Bassompierre, 12 June 1917.

¹²³⁸ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 31 October 1917.

¹²³⁹ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 8 August 1917.

Apparently, the decision had been taken in the royal residence. Van den Steen reported to Van der Elst that the King had asked him for advice concerning “the project to send Conrad B. to London”. According to Van den Steen, Albert told him: “He has such a ridiculous appearance. In England, that is important ... And moreover, he has not shown himself to be a first-class diplomat. Do you know someone who would be suitable for London?” Since Van den Steen thought it would have been somewhat risky to suggest his own brother, in front of the King he claimed that no name came to his mind.¹²⁴⁰

In the King’s opinion, London was the country’s most important diplomatic posting. It is doubtful whether Albert really felt that Buisseret’s unsuitability to lead the Belgian legation sprung from his looks. Representing the country also – and in the King’s case perhaps primarily – meant representing the monarchy. As such, the King will not have wished to have a diplomat with annexationist sympathies as a representative. Perhaps he wished to subtly make this clear by referring to an early modern idea about what diplomats symbolized. In those times, official diplomats were regarded as the near embodiments of their sovereigns. Consequently, they not only had to be of a fitting social status but of a charming outward appearance as well.¹²⁴¹

Broqueville seemingly did not want to argue with Albert over London and accepted the King’s refusal. This put Moncheur back in the picture. Whether because of his looks, his diplomatic talents or his presumed policy preferences, Moncheur was clearly preferred by the King over Buisseret. Henri Costermans, a functionary who was close to Beyens and Van der Elst, informed the latter in late September 1917 that “right upon his arrival, Ludovic saw the posting of London hurled at his head.” Apparently, Moncheur initially hesitated, which Costermans failed to comprehend. “If I were him,” he explained, “I would not hesitate for a moment between the rather humiliating situation he would have to undergo here and the extremely honourable, not to say extremely flattering function which he is being offered.”¹²⁴² Since Moncheur had arrived in Le Havre from the United States presuming that he was still the Political Director, his hesitation probably concealed perplexity rather than doubt about the honour that his nomination in London carried with it. Acquiring the crowning of his

¹²⁴⁰ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 14 August 1917.

¹²⁴¹ OSBORNE, Toby, *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years’ War*, Cambridge, 2002, 70; ROOSEN, William H., “Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial: A Systems Approach”, *The Journal of Modern History*, 52/3, 1980, 462.

¹²⁴² ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 35, Henri Costermans to Léon van der Elst, 26 September 1917. Costermans had become the Beyens’s *chef de cabinet* just before the Foreign Minister resigned, see ADCB, 1930, 209.

diplomatic career indeed beat being pushed aside by someone from the administrative service who was more than sixteen years his junior.

Buisseret, for his part, obtained his recall from St. Petersburg and was offered first another diplomatic postings and ultimately an administrative job at the Department. He had to decline both. According to Costermans, Buisseret had neurasthenia, a psychosomatic disease that more than one Belgian diplomat suffered from in these days. Costermans did not make the link between Buisseret's mental condition and the dramatic events he had experienced over the previous years but commented instead that "he is a charming man, intelligent, very congenial, but little suited, I believe, for the great struggles of life." Buisseret retired in a sanatorium and died in 1927 aged sixty-one years old.¹²⁴³ As one of his last diplomatic deeds, he requested the Russian government to accept the parliamentarian Jules Destrée as his successor.¹²⁴⁴

Already before the outbreak of war, Destrée had been a man of many faces.¹²⁴⁵ Radical Liberal, Socialist, patriot, regionalist, after August 1914 Destrée first manifested himself as an anti-annexationist. In early January 1916, he claimed to find it "painful that the newspapers inspired by the government continue their annexationist propaganda."¹²⁴⁶ However, in the course of that year, arguably persuaded by Pierre Nothomb, Destrée became one of the few Belgian Socialists who came to adhere to the annexationist creed. By the Summer of 1917, he had already authored several publications in which he pleaded for Belgian territorial expansion.¹²⁴⁷ With his appointment, Bassompierre and Orts had managed to send their first like-minded diplomat to represent Belgium in the capital of an Allied country. Unfortunately for them, the men who took over Russia during the October Revolution held a very different conception of diplomacy and war aims than they did.

In the Summer of 1917, the promotion of Bassompierre was not the only one which caused some diplomatic movement. After the appointment of Orts to the functions of Secretary-General had been decided, Broqueville had to deal with the professional future of

¹²⁴³ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 35, Henri Costermans to Léon van der Elst, 3 and 14 November 1917; AMBZ, PF 50, "Conrad de Buisseret-Steenbecque de Blarenguien", Charles de Broqueville to Conrad de Buisseret, 7 December 1920; Guillaume d'Arschot-Schoonhoven to Albert de Bassompierre, 9 August 1920.

¹²⁴⁴ AMBZ, PF 98, "Jules Destrée", Conrad de Buisseret to Charles de Broqueville, 17 August 1917.

¹²⁴⁵ Until today, he and his ideas are the object of historiographical controversy, especially after the publication of SCHREIBER, Jean-Philippe, "Jules Destrée entre séparatisme et nationalisme", in MORELLI, Anne (ed.), *Les grands mythes de l'histoire de Belgique, de Flandre et de Wallonie*, Brussels, 1995, 243-254. For an opposite view, see DESTATTE, Philippe, "Destrée Jules", in DELFORGE, Paul, et al. (eds.), *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon*, 1, 2000, 483-490 (and especially the literature cited on p. 490).

¹²⁴⁶ ARA, I 223, "Papiers de Henry Carton de Wiart, n° 1091, Jules Destrée to Henry Carton de Wiart, 4 January 1916.

¹²⁴⁷ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 412 and 461-462.

Van der Elst. He knew that the King opposed inflicting upon his long-time confidant the same blame as had been put on Baron Beyens. Following the reasoning explained by Orts in his letter to Bassompierre, Van der Elst was indeed a functionary and not a policy-maker like Beyens. That capacity had safeguarded him from conflicts with the King. Nevertheless, Van der Elst had thrown in his lot with Beyens and despite several letters from Van den Steen, who assured him that Albert was still his “loyal friend” and that Broqueville would certainly not be as maladroit to deprive himself from his cooperation, by mid-July 1917 Van der Elst knew he would have to go. He did feel the need to reassure Van den Steen that he was not a broken man, stating that “I am so proud to have always served my King, my Faith and my Fatherland without ambition, without fear, and without reproaches.”¹²⁴⁸

By early August 1917, Van der Elst’s removal had been decided. The King had initially suggested to offer to the former Secretary-General the prestigious Belgian legation at the Holy See. Albert indeed wished to make Jules Van den Heuvel a member of the government in order to strengthen the anti-annexationist camp. Van den Heuvel, however, had refused. Broqueville eventually offered Van der Elst the posting of minister plenipotentiary in Madrid, assuring him that his discharge as Secretary-General was only temporary and that he could return after the peace was signed.¹²⁴⁹ Although Van der Elst accepted, he realized that he would never return to the Foreign Ministry. “So this is the end!” he exclaimed to Van den Steen, who did all he could to console his friend. Van den Steen had already pointed out that Van der Elst’s appointment in Madrid was actually extremely flattering. The King’s *chef de cabinet* emphasized that Van der Elst had been given preference above many career diplomats, thus suggesting that the top function of the administrative career was still less prestigious than heading a second rank European legation. In addition, Van den Steen was happy to add, the King had decided to extend the inheritance of Van der Elst’s baronial title – granted in 1910 – from his first-born son to all his descendants.¹²⁵⁰ Sensing that also this was not enough to alleviate Van der Elst’s suffering, Van den Steen successfully pleaded with the King to have the former Secretary-General enter the diplomatic corps, counting all his service years since he entered state service in 1884. This was an exceptional measure which put Van

¹²⁴⁸ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 183, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 14 and 18 July 1917; Léon van der Elst to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 20 July 1917.

¹²⁴⁹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 183, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 5 August 1917; Léon van der Elst to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 6 August 1917.

¹²⁵⁰ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 9 August 1917; Léon van der Elst to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 11 August 1912.

der Elst at number five on the diplomatic seniority list.¹²⁵¹ Of course, all these favours only partly remedied the new diplomat's sense of exile. Saying goodbye to the Foreign Ministry's personnel in mid-August 1917, Van der Elst felt he was "leaving the old family house by painfully tearing out the roots that attached me to it."¹²⁵²

The sight of Van der Elst stepping out of the *Villa hollandaise*'s front door might have come across to contemporaries as the end of an era. For decades, the former Secretary-General had worked to maintain the country's policy of neutrality in a professional environment where tradition and seniority determined hierarchies between diplomats and bureaucrats and decided about their professional futures. Whatever Broqueville's motives, by promoting the youngsters Orts and Bassompierre and removing the over-sixty's Beyens, Moncheur and Van der Elst, he had turned the Foreign Ministry into the centre of Belgian anti-neutralist and annexationist policy-making. He had moreover opened the doors of the Department to men who belonged to neither the diplomatic nor administrative careers. And this was only part one of the personnel policy he had pushed through.

The Elimination of Baron Paul de Groot

Part two concerned the diplomats stationed in Belgium's European legations. Here it should first be mentioned that not all changes in personnel had the effect of supplanting neutralists by annexationists. For instance, Baron Albéric Grenier, the diplomat whom Van der Elst had to replace, had already subtly suggested that due to his deteriorating health he could no longer handle the increased workload caused by the war.¹²⁵³ Moreover, even the King agreed that Grenier had "shown himself absolutely inferior to what one has to expect from a Belgian diplomat in these times."¹²⁵⁴ After his arrival in Madrid, Van der Elst could indeed report that Grenier "had not understood that his tasks were extended and different." According to Van der Elst, the new professional challenges posed by the war had caused Grenier serious stomach trouble which had developed into neurasthenia. This mental condition had led Grenier to never leave the legation and to take its entire administrative workload upon himself, refusing to appeal to the aid of his secretary. As a result, the diplomat lost many of his political contacts, his health further deteriorated and the legation's offices became more

¹²⁵¹ AMBZ, PF 347, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", Note of Direction P, 18 August 1917; Charles de Broqueville to Albert de Belgique, 18 August and 1 September 1917.

¹²⁵² ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 183, Léon van der Elst to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 17 August 1912.

¹²⁵³ AMBZ, PF 136, "Albéric Grenier", Ludovic Moncheur to Albert de Bassompierre, s.d. [early July 1917]

¹²⁵⁴ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 183, Léon van der Elst to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 6 August 1917.

and more disorganized. Van der Elst also knew that Grenier sensed that he should not have let it come that far.¹²⁵⁵ Most likely, this is why he accepted – albeit reluctantly – Broqueville’s formula in the letter requesting his resignation. It stated that “in the sphere of political information gathering, one deems that you did not deploy all the activity that would have been desirable.”¹²⁵⁶

The same reproach had long been made to Baron Paul de Groote, the Belgian minister plenipotentiary in Bern. In a letter to Van der Elst written in mid-August 1917, Beyens explicitly referred to De Groote’s pending resignation just before expressing his fear about what Broqueville’s personnel policy would do to the Belgian diplomatic career. “Looking at all the transformations that are about to transpire,” Beyens reflected, “I consider myself more than ever fortunate to have resisted as much as I could to the requests made to me to remove heads of mission.” Like the responsibility of “convulsing the old house where I have worked so much”, he did not regret leaving this to his successor. Beyens felt that it was “no less than the ruin of the old diplomatic corps that one is preparing.”¹²⁵⁷ Apparently, the fate that befell Paul de Groote elicited different reactions than the removal of Grenier. What had happened?

Before the war, De Groote’s career had looked very bright. By July 1913, rumours had spread that he would soon be transferred from Bern to lead one of the country’s top legations.¹²⁵⁸ These rumours might have strengthened De Groote when he solicited the posting of London in February 1915, after he had heard that Lalaing had offered his resignation. De Groote made his case by arguing that his name was next on the seniority list and that he spoke English very well.” Moreover, he added, “thanks to my wife who belongs to a distinguished English family, we have numerous and excellent relations in the country.” Finally, De Groote concluded, “we have the means to do a little representation, something which has been too much neglected in our diplomatic service.”¹²⁵⁹ Unfortunately for De Groote, the decision had already been taken, and his was not exactly the profile that the decision-makers judged most appropriate to send to the British capital.

De Groote’s intervention indicates that he would have begged to differ. In a way, his intervention also suggests that the war had not really altered his conception of his tasks as a

¹²⁵⁵ AMBZ, 12.978, “Réorganisation des services extérieurs”, Léon van der Elst to Albert de Bassompierre, 20 October 1917.

¹²⁵⁶ AMBZ, PF 136, “Albéric Grenier”, Charles de Broqueville to Albéric Grenier, 9 August 1917; Albéric Grenier to Charles de Broqueville, s.d. [mid-August 1917].

¹²⁵⁷ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 15 August 1917.

¹²⁵⁸ AMBZ, PF 1404, “Georges della Faille de Leverghem”, Georges della Faille de Leverghem to Léon d’Ursel, 30 July 1913.

¹²⁵⁹ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Groote”, Paul de Groote to Julien Davignon, 10 February 1915.

diplomat. Unlike De Groote suggested, seniority and representation had effectively lost importance. Conversely, giving aid to Belgian refugees, gathering political information and facilitating propaganda campaigns in favour of Belgium had developed into a diplomat's key tasks. De Groote did not oppose these activities but did not manifest any pro-active behaviour in these spheres either.¹²⁶⁰ In the course of 1915 and 1916, this led Beyens and his collaborators to regularly urge the diplomat to keep them better informed about opinions on Belgium expressed in Swiss political circles and in the country's newspapers. De Groote always retorted that he did all he could, but that he lacked the time to do a proper job and disposed of primarily incompetent personnel. At least until the Summer of 1916, his argumentation seems to have been more or less accepted.¹²⁶¹ Afterwards, the tone of the correspondence between Beyens and De Groote exacerbated. In a report sent in September 1916, De Groote had referred to one of the Foreign Minister's questions as "a boyish prank", which elicited from Beyens the reproach that "a diplomat with thirty-two years of experience should not afford such slips of the pen." De Groote replied that his comment was a reaction to the tendency of the Department's personnel to always put him in the wrong. He then illustrated his argument by providing several pages of examples of Beyens wrongfully – in De Groote's view – accusing him of errors he had made.¹²⁶²

Over the next few months, various negative appreciations of De Groote's qualities reached Broqueville and other members of the government. In a letter to the King, Broqueville pointed out that during a Cabinet meeting the government had unanimously insisted with Beyens to have De Groote removed, arguing that "our minister in Bern is really by much inferior to his task."¹²⁶³ Despite his seriously tensed relationship with De Groote, Beyens refused. He did ask the Political Director to evaluate De Groote's activities over the past year and sent this report to the King. In his letter to Albert, Beyens acknowledged that De Groote's political correspondence contained too much summaries of press articles and too little interesting information which the diplomat should have gathered through his political and diplomatic contacts in Bern. In De Groote's defence, Beyens invoked the increased administrative burdens of the legation and the fact that the capital of neutral Switzerland constituted a spy nest where everyone mistrusted everyone. Beyens suggested to the King that

¹²⁶⁰ MERTENS, 1917, 11-12 and 15-16.

¹²⁶¹ See for instance ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 87, Paul de Groote to Julien Davignon, 1 January 1915; Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul de Groote, 30 October 1915; Paul de Groote to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 31 October 1915; n° 145, Paul de Groote to Léon van der Elst, 23 July 1916; AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Groote", Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul de Groote, 15 April 1916.

¹²⁶² ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 87, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul de Groote, 18 September 1916; Paul de Groote to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 20 September 1916.

¹²⁶³ AKP, AE, n° 61, Charles de Broqueville to Albert de Belgique, 10 December 1916.

he would give the diplomat “a serious warning.”¹²⁶⁴ For the time being, this safeguarded De Groote’s professional future.

Of course, it did not immediately alleviate his tensed relationship with Beyens. In late January 1917, De Groote openly criticized a number of decisions taken at the Foreign Ministry regarding the Belgian consular representation in Switzerland. Beyens could not leave it at that. “Despite my advice, followed by several warnings,” he replied, “you continue to adopt in your official correspondence a truly intolerable mocking tone and to allow yourself to give impertinent remarks that openly tend to lecture my Department.” Beyens emphasized that no Foreign Minister could tolerate that the head of a legation assumed such an attitude towards him. What made things even worse, Beyens pointed out to De Groote, was that “you owe it to my benevolence that you are still the Belgian minister in Bern.” He explained that his colleagues in the government had repeatedly pleaded to remove De Groote but that he had so far always successfully defended the diplomat’s cause. If De Groote would not heed this last warning, Beyens insisted, he would be compelled to no longer oppose “the realization of the unanimously expressed wish of my colleagues.”¹²⁶⁵ De Groote complied and over the next few months his relationship with Beyens regained a certain degree of mutual trust.¹²⁶⁶

This episode provides a further illustration of how far Beyens was willing to go to grant honourable career endings to senior diplomats. Beyens’s decision also sharply contrasts with the attitude Broqueville adopted towards diplomats who were not up to their tasks. Indeed, once Beyens had left the Foreign Ministry, it would not take long before Broqueville removed De Groote from Bern. However, as Broqueville told Bassompierre, there was a slight problem, namely that the King did not seem inclined to give his consent.¹²⁶⁷

Surely, Albert would soon give in. Yet in the cases of Havenith, Grenier, and other recent diplomatic removals because of insufficiency the King had not offered this symbolic resistance. This suggests that in the case of De Groote, there was more to it. Taking a look in Orts’s memoirs confirms this suspicion. On the one hand, Orts provided more general reflections on Belgian diplomats who were unprepared for the role of political informant

¹²⁶⁴ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Groote”, Note of Direction P, 13 December 1916; PF 147, “Emmanuel Havenith”, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Albert de Belgique, 25 December 1916.

¹²⁶⁵ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 87, Paul de Groote to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 23 January 1917; Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul de Groote, 27 January 1917.

¹²⁶⁶ At least, his personnel file at the Belgian Foreign Ministry contains no more mutual reproaches after 27 January 1917, nor does his private papers at the Belgian National Archives. Correspondence in April 1917 testifies that mutual trust was re-entering the relations between Beyens and De Groote. See ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 102, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul de Groote, 15 April 1917; Paul de Groote to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 21 April 1917

¹²⁶⁷ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 10 August 1917.

which the war had forced them to assume. The choice of their contacts, Orts claimed to remember, was dictated by “personal affinities, similar lifestyles and other considerations which had nothing to do with gathering useful contacts.” On the other hand, Orts specified that some diplomats failed to understand that “Belgium could have a foreign policy” and that this meant they had to abandon some of their old habits. Orts illustrated this statement with one example: “In one foreign capital the Belgian minister was kept at a distance by the representatives of the Allied countries, because he continued to play cards every evening with a friend who happened to be the minister of Bavaria.” Comparing Orts’s memoirs with those of Pleasant E. Stovall, the American minister plenipotentiary in Bern during the First World War, reveals that the Belgian minister in question was indeed Paul de Groote. Stovall described diplomatic life in Switzerland as extremely segregated, meaning that diplomats from the Allied, neutral, and Central powers each tried as best as they could to avoid members of another group. However, Stovall suggested, there were at least two exceptions, namely “his Excellency, M. le Chevalier Gottfried von Böhm, Minister Resident from Bavaria” and “the Belgian Minister”.¹²⁶⁸

If the contacts between De Groote and Böhm were striking enough for an American diplomat to write them down in his memoirs more than twenty years later, it should come as no surprise that diplomats and bureaucrats at the *Villa hollandaise* knew about them much sooner. Most likely, this happened through the allegedly incompetent personnel that De Groote had complained about and had managed to send away from Bern. One of these junior diplomats was the attaché Count Guillaume de Diesbach-Belleruche, who was sent from Le Havre to Bern in the course of 1915. After De Groote had repeatedly complained that Diesbach often did not show up at the legation, had made serious debts, and was suspected by the Swiss government of operating as a spy for the French embassy, the Foreign Minister agreed to have the young attaché removed from Bern.¹²⁶⁹ Upon arriving in Le Havre in April 1916, Diesbach was “soundly lectured by all” but nonetheless invited afterwards to dinner by Bassompierre to whom he justified himself by invoking “Groote’s stupidity, Germanophily – etc.”¹²⁷⁰ Having tasted the anti-neutralist and annexationist atmosphere at the Political Direction in the second half of 1914, Diesbach knew that these comments increased his chances of regaining Bassompierre’s favour.

¹²⁶⁸ STOVALL, Pleasant E., *Switzerland and the world war*, Madison, 1939, 174-176.

¹²⁶⁹ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 87, Paul de Groote to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 31 October 1915, 31 January and 3 March 1916; Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul de Groote, 3 November 1915 and 13 March 1916.

¹²⁷⁰ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 18 April 1916.

To Bassompierre, Diesbach's accusations will probably only have confirmed his suspicions. During the First World War, Diesbach was indeed the second junior diplomat to be sent away from the Belgian legation in Bern. Less than a year earlier, a similar fate had befallen the advisor Georges de Raymond. In letters of complaint about the incompetence of his personnel, De Groote heaped De Raymond together with Diesbach, repeatedly referring to "no-goods like de Raymond and de Diesbach."¹²⁷¹ According to De Groote, also De Raymond often did not show up at the legation. Moreover, De Groote claimed, the advisor was selfish and insolent.¹²⁷² After hearing both parties, the Foreign Minister agreed with De Groote that De Raymond had adopted an inadmissible attitude, and transferred him "for the duration of the war" to the Belgian consulate-general in London.¹²⁷³ This certainly constituted a disgrace. At the outbreak of war, De Raymond's career counted almost twenty years of service, which he had almost exclusively spent in Belgium's most prestigious legations. After more than five years as an advisor, he would now have to serve under a member of the consular career, which also in the Belgian Foreign Office mind was regarded as the 'Cinderella service'. Yet almost immediately after Broqueville had taken over the Foreign Ministry in the Summer of 1917, De Raymond obtained his promotion to minister plenipotentiary and was sent off to lead a diplomatic posting.¹²⁷⁴

This indicates that Bassompierre and Orts had never really accepted that a slur was cast on De Raymond because of his behaviour in Bern. Bassompierre's diaries indeed reveal that the advisor had kept close contact with the nationalists at the *Villa hollandaise* during his 'exile' to the consular service.¹²⁷⁵ Most likely, shared ideas about Belgian foreign policy had driven these men towards each other. As we have seen, the First World War generated in many Congo generation diplomats some kind of symbiosis between the pre-war Greater Belgium idea and the annexationist ideology. De Raymond was definitely a Congo generation diplomat. He was a close friend of Roger de Borchgrave, had always considered Roger's father Emile as some kind of mentor, and was a great admirer of Leopold II's colonial oeuvre. This admiration seems to have gone quite far, given that De Raymond was even asked to

¹²⁷¹ ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 87, Paul de Groote to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 18 April and 20 September 1916.

¹²⁷² ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 87, Paul de Groote to Julien Davignon, 17 April 1915.

¹²⁷³ AMBZ, PF 1536, "Georges de Raymond", Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy to Julien Davignon, 28 April 1915; Julien Davignon to Georges de Raymond, 29 April 1915.

¹²⁷⁴ ADCB, 1925, 220-221.

¹²⁷⁵ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 9 August 1916 and 26 January 1917.

serve as the King's double during his visit to Paris in 1900.¹²⁷⁶ What exactly had happened fifteen years later to create a deep conflict between De Groote and De Raymond, remains unclear. Until his arrival in Bern, De Raymond never seems to have received any negative appreciations of his diplomatic and personal qualities.¹²⁷⁷ Could it be that his lack of diligence and punctuality sprung from his condemnation of his chief's allegedly Germanophile behaviour?

In any case, De Raymond would not have been the only Belgian junior diplomat who interpreted the actions of his superior at the onset of the First World War as inspired by a pro-German attitude. Count Philippe de Beaufort, first secretary at the Belgian legation in Stockholm, did so too. At the end of August 1914, Beaufort sent to the Foreign Ministry a number of letters in which he piled up the accusations against his chief Charles Wauters. The young diplomat claimed that the other members of the Stockholm diplomatic corps refused to interact with Wauters as a consequence of his chief's behaviour. Apart from turning the legation into "a true house of debauchery where dinners with women are common", this behaviour included interacting with the German minister in Sweden in such a manner that he got himself talked about. While Wauters had no difficulties refuting Beaufort's allegations, rumours about his allegedly germanophile attitude continued to arise during and after the war.¹²⁷⁸

The case of Wauters supports the claim that several members of the younger generation of Belgian diplomats interpreted the 'neutralist' way in which many senior diplomats understood their duties as pro-German behaviour and therefore started manoeuvring to have their superiors removed.¹²⁷⁹ It is indeed likely that this also occurred in

¹²⁷⁶ See AMBZ, PF 1536, "Georges de Raymond", Georges de Raymond to Roger de Borchgrave, 12 May 1918; DE RAYMOND, Georges, *Léopold II à Paris: Souvenirs*, Brussels, 1950; LAUREYS, Eric, "De Raymond, Georges", *Koninklijke Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen*, url: <http://www.kaowarsom.be/en/notices_de_raymond_georges>, last checked on 19 October 2013.

¹²⁷⁷ At least, none of these are to be found in his personnel file at the Belgian Foreign Ministry Archives. See AMBZ, PF 1536, "Georges de Raymond".

¹²⁷⁸ The quotes are from KONINCKX, *De Belgische diplomatieke dienst*, 375. When Koninckx wrote her Master's Thesis in the early 1980s, the circa forty documents that relate the incident between Beaufort and Wauters were still to be found in the latter's personnel file. In the summer of 2010, when I consulted this file, they were no longer there. Yet their existence can be retraced by the contemporary inventory with which the dossier opens. Also missing from the Wauters file is a "letter accusing W. of being Germanophile", written by the wife of Wauters's predecessor to the wife of the consul Charles Renoz in early 1918. See AMBZ, PF 387, "Charles Wauters". I have found no documents relating the incident in the personnel file of Count Philippe de Beaufort, which did contain some correspondence mentioning that there was a conflict. See AMBZ, PF 218, "Philippe de Beaufort". After the war, Wauters would be subject to allegations of being a Germanophile published in *La Nation belge* of 28 November 1919, the newspaper that Fernand Neuray founded in March 1918.

¹²⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the personnel of the Belgian Foreign Ministry Archives until this day adopts a policy of censorship when it concerns the incidents that the 'revolt' of these junior diplomats led to, so that most of these stories cannot be reconstructed. However, contemporary inventories in diplomatic personnel files and research

the case of De Grootte, who will have quickly come to regret that the recall of De Raymond was followed by the arrival of another Congo generation diplomat, first secretary Baron Henry de Woelmont, who was one of the few diplomats present at the expansionist Congress of Mons in 1905 and had in the meantime become friendly with Bassompierre.¹²⁸⁰

All this suggests that Bassompierre was not surprised at all when Diesbach told him in late April 1916 about De Grootte's "Germanophily". Diesbach's statements did lead Henri Costermans to inform De Grootte about certain rumours which had reached Le Havre. "Someone who only means you well," Costermans wrote, "has personally confided to me that some of your colleagues, representatives of the Allied Powers, take umbrage at your alleged dealings with the minister of Bavaria in Bern." Costermans did not condemn these interactions, claiming to be certain that De Grootte knew what he was doing.¹²⁸¹

Although the word "Germanophile" or terms with similar connotations were absent in the personal letter he received from Le Havre, De Grootte did feel the need to reassure Costermans that "I have always been little Germanophile", explaining that already before the war, he had repeatedly warned the Belgian government for the danger approaching from the other side of the Rhine. "And I have stayed Germanophobe", De Grootte stressed. However, he specified, for him this did not mean copying the conduct of several of the Allied diplomats who "shout at any occasion 'The Boches need to be crushed' [...] and turn their backs when they meet the Minister of Bavaria, a perfectly harmless man and a real anti-Prussian." So, De Grootte continued, "if some of my colleagues have taken umbrage at the so-called relations that I am presumed to have with the Minister of Bavaria, those colleagues are cretins." De Grootte argued that while he and Böhm had been friends for twenty-five years, since the outbreak of war they had only spoken a few times. To be sure, he had informed the Department about these conversations. However, after one of the Allied diplomats, whom De Grootte had also told about their talks, had "deemed witty to launch the legend of my friendly relations with the minister of Bavaria," he and Böhm had limited their interactions to a mere nod when they ran in to each other.¹²⁸² A few weeks later, De Grootte complained to Waxweiler, who had been involved with King Albert's brother-in-law in secret negotiations held in Zürich, that he had wished to offer Böhm the latest book Waxweiler had written about

undertaken at times when less vigilance was exercised, allow to at least glimpse at some of the incidents between junior and senior diplomatic legation personnel.

¹²⁸⁰ See ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Grootte", n° 87, Paul de Grootte to Albert de Bassompierre, 18 April 1916. For proof of the intimate relationship that existed between Woelmont and Bassompierre, see AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Grootte", Henry de Woelmont to Albert de Bassompierre, 5 November 1917.

¹²⁸¹ AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Grootte", Henri Costermans to Paul de Grootte, 4 May 1916.

¹²⁸² AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Grootte", Paul de Grootte to Henri Costermans, 10 May 1916.

the violation of Belgian neutrality. Yet, De Groote regretted, “in Le Havre, they tend so easily to suspect agents of having connections with the enemy that I will not risk to stop at the corner of even an empty street to exchange a few words with your admirer.”¹²⁸³

Although De Groote seemingly modified his behaviour after receiving Costermans’s letter, he clearly did not approve of the Department’s policy, which had actually been known to him for quite some time. In February 1916, one of the functionaries at the *Villa hollandaise* had reminded him that any contact with diplomats from the Central Powers was strictly prohibited and that unavoidable conversations had to be interrupted “after a few cold and meaningless words.”¹²⁸⁴ De Groote opposed such manner of acting. On the one hand, he refused to put all German citizens in the same category – although his use of the terms “Germanophile” and “Germanophobe” reveals that he was not being very consistent. De Groote seems to have identified Prussian military circles as carrying the responsibility for the invasion of Belgium, and not the entire elite of the German state, let alone the entire German people. On the other hand, De Groote seems to have continued to represent neutral Belgium in the way that he always had, namely adopting a similar attitude towards representatives of both Allied and Central Powers. This was also what the King expected from his diplomats. Albert had indeed insisted with the government that the attitude adopted by Belgian diplomats abroad reflected “a freely chosen neutrality” and he had made Baron Beyens Foreign Minister to facilitate, among other things, the implementation of this directive.¹²⁸⁵ Moreover, the Waxweiler-Törring conversations, which were secret but nonetheless probably known to De Groote, will have convinced him that the King would not oppose his interactions with another Bavarian nobleman.

Albert even seems to have seen in De Groote a reliable contact for information about the activities of Belgian annexationists in Switzerland. In July 1917, he inquired via Van den Steen about the Belgian propaganda for the annexation of Luxembourg. De Groote interpreted the royal request as an incentive to investigate the activities of Pierre Nothomb, who had then just arrived in Bern. It was an open secret, De Groote reported, that Nothomb had arrived to solve the “Luxembourg problem” by means of machinations in the relatively large Luxembourgian expat community. De Groote was proud to point out that he himself had undertaken some actions that truly served the Belgian cause, adding “and I have not breathed

¹²⁸³ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 88, Paul de Groote to Emile Waxweiler, 6 June 1916.

¹²⁸⁴ MERTENS, 1917, 15.

¹²⁸⁵ PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 231-232.

a word about it to M. P. Nothomb who seems to be too boisterous and garrulous to do a good job.”¹²⁸⁶

Reading this message forwarded by Van den Steen, Albert will probably have paid little attention to the mistrust towards outsiders engaging in diplomatic affairs which was implicit in De Groote’s letter. Rather, he will have noticed that with De Groote, he disposed of an agent who was willing to keep an eye on the annexationist machinations of his compatriots and to report about them directly to De Panne.

Conversely, since he and Broqueville had only just demanded and obtained the resignation of Baron Beyens, Albert will not have liked the association that De Groote made between the removal of Beyens and the inevitable breakthrough of annexationist claims in Belgian foreign policy formulation. De Groote indeed stressed that Nothomb had arrived in a climate of rumours that the solution to the Luxembourgian question required “the discharge of Baron Beyens.” In another letter, De Groote labelled “the intrigues that have led to the fall of our Colleague” as “a sad chapter in the history of these times.” Belgian annexationists in both Switzerland and Le Havre had played their part in this chapter and their grandstandery jeopardized the results of the cautious foreign policy conducted so far, De Groote concluded while pointing to the wife of the first secretary whom the Foreign Ministry had sent him as the replacement of De Raymond: “Our little Richelieus are certainly not hindered by scruples and I even know a lady (the baroness de Woelmont) in Bern with a lively imagination and very talkative, who is set on achieving the triumph of ‘her policy’... The indiscretions committed in this way will one day cause us serious difficulties.”¹²⁸⁷ Understandably, De Groote did not see the hand of the King in Beyens’s dismissal. Perhaps by associating himself with the former Foreign Minister, whose ideas he shared and which he believed were also Albert’s, De Groote hoped to gain the approval of the King, perhaps even the royal protection against what he might have seen coming, namely his own removal.

In order to better understand De Groote’s reactions against what could be the end of his career, it is important to investigate how exactly the process of his discharge transpired. Less than a week after De Groote had sent this letter to Van den Steen, he read in the press that in Le Havre his dismissal had been decided. At least four days later, Broqueville sent him a rather wry telegram, stating “I have decided confide post minister Bern to Peltzer ... Letter

¹²⁸⁶ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 87, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Paul de Groote; 6 July 1917; Paul de Groote to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 25 July 1917.

¹²⁸⁷ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 87, Paul de Groote to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 4 August 1917.

follows with details and instructions.”¹²⁸⁸ The Cabinet Chief had initially decided not to telegraph at all, following Bassompierre’s advice that such action was “not indispensable” given that De Grootte had already read this information in the newspapers. “A few days more or less before he receives the official news of the decision taken in his regard,” Bassompierre argued, “that is not so important.”¹²⁸⁹ To De Grootte, it surely was. After Broqueville had decided to telegraph anyway, the Political Direction provided the motivation for De Grootte’s discharge. Evaluating the diplomats’ reports sent since January 1917, functionaries made a distinction between summaries of the press and “proper political reports”.¹²⁹⁰ The underrepresentation of the latter constituted the foundation of Broqueville’s official letter to De Grootte. Broqueville argued that the war had turned Bern into an extremely important posting because in the Swiss capital diplomats could “most easily acquire information about the material and moral condition of the enemy and about his projects.” Since “only a few” of De Grootte’s reports contained information extracted from other than published sources, Broqueville claimed, he had to join the opinion of his colleagues in the government that the diplomat had underachieved in this regard. Moreover, the Cabinet Chief informed De Grootte, Belgians residing in Switzerland reproached him for not taking enough pain over their needs, for insufficiently exerting himself to gain Belgium more favour from the Swiss and for having only official relations with diplomats from the Allied powers. Broqueville did implicitly claim to manifest some consideration for the diplomat’s honour: he authorized De Grootte to take the initiative for his departure and to invoke health reasons, allowed him to preserve his full salary and gave him the choice to either stay on until the arrival of his successor or to name Woelmont chargé d’affaires ad interim when he deemed fit.¹²⁹¹

In a long letter to Broqueville, De Grootte first objected against each of the allegations the Cabinet Chief had confronted him with. Not only had he written, in 1917 alone, over a hundred reports based on information gathered from private sources, he had also passed many nights at the Bern railway station to receive Belgian detainees and had spent much money to financially support Belgian refugees.¹²⁹² De Grootte might have altered the truth a little while stating that his relations with Allied diplomats had “always been and continue to be excellent.” Addressing very briefly the issue of propaganda, he claimed not to have received

¹²⁸⁸ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Grootte”, Charles de Broqueville to Paul de Grootte, 14 August 1917.

¹²⁸⁹ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Grootte”, Note of Direction P, s.d. [12 August 1917].

¹²⁹⁰ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Grootte”, Note of Direction P: ‘Liste des rapports de l’année 1917 expédiés par la légation de Berne’, 16 August 1917.

¹²⁹¹ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Grootte”, Charles de Broqueville to Paul de Grootte, 16 August 1917.

¹²⁹² At least De Grootte’s assertion about the number of ‘proper political reports’ seems to be correct. According to the aforementioned note of the Political Direction, De Grootte sent 103 of these between 1 January and 30 June 1917.

any funding for such activities. As such, he could exert no influence on the Swiss press.¹²⁹³ Since De Groote devoted little attention to this question and made no reference to other, less costly ways to influence Swiss public opinion, one might suspect that he did not rank conducting propaganda campaigns among a Belgian diplomat's core activities.

In the second part of his letter, De Groote suggested that the disgrace inflicted upon him outweighed by far the concessions that Broqueville had granted. An honourable way out seemed no longer possible. The diplomat felt especially offended because the decision to remove him from Bern had been made public "by Le Havre" and published in French, Belgian and Swiss newspapers ten days before he was officially informed. De Groote indeed knew perfectly well that this equated "casting a shadow of disgrace on an old functionary." Since "this new procedure" had acquainted the great public with the blame inflicted upon him, De Groote continued, it rendered meaningless Broqueville's proposition that the diplomat would take the initiative for his departure invoking health reasons.¹²⁹⁴ Seemingly, De Groote took the humiliation caused by the publication of his discharge more badly than the discharge itself. He indeed emphasized in many of the letters he wrote over the next weeks to his colleagues and other correspondents the lack of respect shown through the allegedly new procedure of publishing the decision in the press "ten days" (which was an exaggeration) before the official communication. In these letters he also repeated that "the Foreign Ministry", by which he most likely meant Orts and Bassompierre, had deliberately leaked to the press. To Van den Steen, De Groote complained that he had really not expected "the 'go jump in the lake'-practices" that he was subjected to. He therefore asked the King's *chef de cabinet* "not to leave this new method unknown in High places."¹²⁹⁵

In the previous chapter I have suggested that for many senior diplomats adopting a neutralist stance implied a serious amount of self-effacement. This condition was incompatible with attracting too much attention to one's person, let alone exposing oneself to public scrutiny. More importantly, however, diplomats who received negative press coverage when they were virtually at the end of their careers will certainly have perceived the threat that their investments in time and money were coming to nothing. Instead of honour, disgrace was bestowed upon them. What made things even worse for these diplomats, was that they

¹²⁹³ AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Groote", Paul de Groote to Charles de Broqueville, 25 August 1917.

¹²⁹⁴ AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Groote", Paul de Groote to Charles de Broqueville, 25 August 1917.

¹²⁹⁵ See ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 87, Paul de Groote to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 31 August 1917; n° 124, Paul de Groote to Henry Carton de Wiart; n° 177, Paul de Groote to Jules van den Heuvel, 23 September 1917. The rumours that De Groote was very much disliked by the Belgian colony in Bern were probably spread by Bassompierre, see SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 24 October 1916.

clearly felt that, more than before the war, the “great public” was not only watching them with increased expectations but also judging whether their actions were truly inspired by patriotism. According to diplomats, the public drew its conclusions based on what it read in newspapers.

Perhaps to save at least part of his honour, De Groote asked Broqueville to name him “attaché at the Legation of the King in Bern for the study of technical questions.” The diplomat wished to devote his “forced leisure” to drafting an analysis of the electrification of the Swiss railway system and promised Broqueville to use this “modest capacity” only for these reasons. “For the rest”, he concluded, “I will be just a simple Belgian in Switzerland always ready to serve his country.”¹²⁹⁶ Like Beyens, who during his diplomatic inactivity in late 1917 wished to further Belgian interests by writing articles about the country’s political position in post-war Europe, De Groote chose to do the same by focusing on aspects relating to Belgium’s economic reconstruction.

Unfortunately for him, Broqueville refused to satisfy his request. The Cabinet Chief claimed to be surprised that De Groote did not sense “that this idea is contrary to all the customs and even incompatible with your anterior situation.” He was also convinced that the diplomat, after some reflection, would come to share his point of view that two ministers of the same country residing in a city like Bern would cause inconveniences for both of them. Clearly irritated by De Groote’s attitude, Broqueville now urged him to hand over the direction of the legation to Woelmont and also asked him if he really wanted that the words ‘on his request motivated by health reasons’ were deleted from the Royal Decree concerning his discharge.¹²⁹⁷

De Groote chose the confrontation in all three of these issues. First, he confirmed that he did not wish the Royal Decree to contain statements “that would put me in contradiction with the facts.” Since Swiss politicians, journalists and fellow diplomats had inquired him about his impending resignation days before he had received the official communication, De Groote argued, he had been compelled to answer them that he knew of nothing. As a consequence, no one would believe that he had asked for his discharge himself.¹²⁹⁸ Surely, his refusal was also a way of condemning the disrespectful manner in which he felt to have been treated. Like Baron Guillaume, who claimed that he regarded his removal from Paris as a mark of honour which he would proudly pass on to his children, De Groote seems to have

¹²⁹⁶ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Groote”, Paul de Groote to Charles de Broqueville, 25 August 1917.

¹²⁹⁷ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Groote”, Charles de Broqueville to Paul de Groote, 7 September 1917.

¹²⁹⁸ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 87, Paul de Groote to Charles de Broqueville, 12 September 1917; AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Groote”, Paul de Groote to Charles de Broqueville, 13 September 1917.

wanted to leave traces of the procedure he had been subjected to for future generations to find. In a way, this was saying that his behaviour had been upright, that he had done a proper job despite the allegations formulated against him. When he left the legation, De Groote would also refuse to hand over a mould representing the Belgian coat of arms and a stamp saying 'Legation of Belgium in Switzerland'. According to Woelmont and De Groote's successor, the diplomat had argued that he had these objects made at his own expense and therefore chose to hold on to them.¹²⁹⁹ Given that he still did not want to give them up after his successor had offered to reimburse him for them, his decision clearly also had a symbolic meaning. At least to a certain extent, De Groote indeed still considered himself to be the legitimate representative of Belgium in the Swiss capital.

Second, and closely related to this, instead of immediately handing over the direction of the legation to Woelmont, De Groote continued in his official capacity to serve King and Country the way he deemed fit. Like King Albert, De Groote saw Belgium as a neutral country which fought against Germany alongside France and Great-Britain but was not bound by any alliance with these countries. Like Albert, De Groote believed that the war would lead to a negotiated rather than an unconditional peace.¹³⁰⁰ This is probably why, in the wake of the mid-August 1917 papal peace proposal which included the restoration of Belgium to its full political, military and economic independence, the diplomat decided to try to enhance the success of this initiative by opening an extra communication line involving the unofficial papal representative Mgr. Marchetti, the minister of Bavaria and himself.¹³⁰¹ In a letter to Broqueville written in late September 1917, De Groote reported that he had already approached Marchetti several times before. At these occasions he had always insisted that the peace process could only start after a declaration from the German government that it would have Belgium evacuated, fully restored, and equitably repaired. "Getting Germany to repent," De Groote wrote, "seemed to me the first milestone to put." The diplomat was happy to inform Broqueville that Marchetti had communicated his ideas "to diverse personalities among which M. de Böhm, Minister of Bavaria." De Groote even claimed to have reasons to believe that the proposition which originated between him and Marchetti had in the meantime

¹²⁹⁹ AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Groote", Henry de Woelmont to Albert de Bassompierre, 5 November 1917; ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 238, Fernand Peltzer to Paul de Groote, 27 December 1917. De Groote eventually returned the mould around Christmas 1917. By then he had still not returned the stamp.

¹³⁰⁰ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 331-332.

¹³⁰¹ For Belgium's reaction to the papal peace initiative, see PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 274-275.

reached the German Council of Ministers. There, “only reasons of expediency, of tactics and of interior politics momentarily prevented its adoption”, De Groote stated.¹³⁰²

As we will see, Broqueville was at the same time engaging in indirect negotiations with German contacts as well. Also he operated without the knowledge of both the officials at the Foreign Ministry and his colleagues in the government. Given that not long after the arrival of De Groote’s letter, Broqueville’s dealings became known in Le Havre and immediately met with loud and unanimous disapproval, it took some time before De Groote received an answer. Although signed by Broqueville, the eventual reply was clearly drafted by Bassompierre. In that letter, De Groote was urged to inform the Ministry “by return of post” whether he considered himself authorized – and if so, by virtue of which instructions – to communicate to the enemy opinions which the latter might regard as reflecting the Belgian government’s stance. “That was absolutely not the case, Broqueville (or rather Bassompierre) continued, exhorting De Groote to immediately inform Marchetti that his actions sprung from a personal initiative, that they had occurred unknown to the Belgian government and that it formally denounced them.¹³⁰³

This time, De Groote immediately complied.¹³⁰⁴ He will have realized that he had seriously overstepped the boundaries of his authority. Yet the letter from the Ministry must have left De Groote somewhat confused as well. Had he not been reproached for not making the most of his presence as a diplomat in a neutral and strategically located capital? Had Broqueville, in his declaration of intent sent in early August 1917 to all diplomatic postings, not emphasized that diplomats were also executives, that they had to keep in mind that their “bleeding and suffering” yet “enduring and loyal” country of 1917 would no longer play “the effaced role” of earlier times, and that for diplomats “only inaction deserved reprobation”? The Cabinet Chief – or rather Bassompierre and Orts – certainly had. Conversely, however, his declaration of intent also stated that the war had revealed “the profound vitality of the kingdom” and invited Belgian diplomats “to imbue themselves with the moral value and the effective force that Belgium represents.” In order to make this value and that force grow further, they had to keep in mind that the war had also proven “that Belgium will be a political factor of prime importance in the Europe of tomorrow [...] and that Belgium is a flag with which the Allied cause in general has an evident interest to cover itself.”¹³⁰⁵ The emphasis on the country’s growth and the identification with the policy of the Allies which sprung from

¹³⁰² ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 30, Paul de Groote to Charles de Broqueville, 21 September 1917.

¹³⁰³ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 30, Charles de Broqueville to Paul de Groote, 5 October 1917.

¹³⁰⁴ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 30, Paul de Groote to Charles de Broqueville, 9 October 1917.

¹³⁰⁵ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 87, Charles de Broqueville to Paul de Groote, 13 August 1917.

these statements were, of course, incompatible with manoeuvres to restore Belgium to its pre-war condition, certainly when the Allies were not consulted first.

Since such manoeuvres always bore the risk to become public, they would arguably lead the men in charge of the Foreign Ministry to urge even stronger for De Groote's departure from Bern. This brings us to the third issue in which the diplomat chose the confrontation. De Groote indeed disagreed with Broqueville's reasoning – again, it was actually Bassompierre and Orts who drafted these documents – about the necessity of his leaving the Swiss capital. Invoking the examples of Lalaing, D'Erp and other senior diplomats who had been removed from their postings but whom he believed – mistakenly in the case of D'Erp – continued to occupy their private residences in those capitals, he argued that there was no reason for him to leave. Before the war, he added, former and current heads of the Belgian legation had lived in Bern at the same time. According to De Groote, this had never caused any problems. The diplomat also claimed not to understand why Broqueville refused to attach him to the legation. High-ranked Swiss personalities had praised him for his project, De Groote argued, subtly adding that “in the oldest democracy of Europe no honourable work is considered contrary to the customs or incompatible with an anterior situation.”¹³⁰⁶ Here, De Groote implicitly responded to the prejudice, often formulated by politicians, that diplomats were an undemocratic elite of men who had completely lost touch with the requirements of contemporary diplomacy, which included representing the nation or the people and defending their economic interests. At the same time, he reversed roles, suggesting that Broqueville set himself up as the keeper of traditions which were incompatible with democratic policy and which politicians like him had always contested.

For the next two months, De Groote refused to move. He only considered the possibility of leaving the Swiss capital after Broqueville had asked Woelmont, in mid-November 1917, to inform his former chief that “the King's government invites him to choose a residence other than Bern.”¹³⁰⁷ This reference to the will of the sovereign apparently led to some leniency from De Groote. Provided that a number of conditions were met, the diplomat replied to Broqueville, “I might possibly be disposed to go reside in Paris.” These conditions included his attachment to the Belgian legation in Paris “for the study of economic or other questions”, a full refund of all the financial costs his moving entailed and all privileges generally accorded to travelling diplomats. After invoking once again the indiscretions which had accompanied his discharge, De Groote repeated why he acted the way he did: “Having

¹³⁰⁶ ARA, I 222, “Papiers de Groote”, n° 87, Paul de Groote to Charles de Broqueville, 12 September 1917.

¹³⁰⁷ AMBZ, PF 139, “Paul de Groote”, Charles de Broqueville to Henry de Woelmont, 11 November 1917.

dedicated thirty-three years of my life to state service and having spent one and a half million of my and my wife's money in representation costs, I am by far too badly compensated to still attach much value to the career. Consequently, I am more inclined to renounce, if need be, my title of minister and my salary in order to recover my entire liberty, than to leave Bern in other conditions than the ones mentioned above."¹³⁰⁸ After Broqueville had granted, albeit not without making reproaches, all his conditions except for his attachment to the Paris legation, De Groote gradually reconciled himself with the idea of moving to France.¹³⁰⁹

Most likely, his eventual decision to leave Switzerland, which he did only in the Summer of 1918, was inspired by his desire to nonetheless pursue his diplomatic career at one point in the future and thus not to jeopardize his chances to do so any further.¹³¹⁰ De Groote might have indeed realized that whereas at the head of the Department politicians such as Broqueville came and went, the young functionaries in charge were probably there to stay for many years, like their predecessors Arendt and Van der Elst had done. As we have seen, Orts claimed in his memoirs that Broqueville always just passed by when he visited the *Villa hollandaise*, almost blindly signing documents and letters and agreeing to Orts's every word. If this is true, it leads one to wonder against whom De Groote actually believed that he was reacting? In his memoirs, right after the passage about De Groote's card games with the minister of Bavaria, Orts writes that he had invited the diplomat to assert his rights to retirement and that De Groote had never forgiven him for that.¹³¹¹ It is unclear when exactly, but De Groote will have known soon enough that he was corresponding with Orts and Bassompierre rather than with Broqueville. As a senior diplomat with so many years of service, he knew the procedures for the Foreign Ministry's correspondence with the legations and will have recognized the authorship of the letters sent to him and the many implicit references to a common diplomatic culture that they contained. Perhaps this explains why in his letters to Le Havre De Groote adopted a rather frank tone and kept accusing "the Ministry" of the press leaks that besmirched his honour. In contrast with for instance Lalaing and D'Erp, who two and a half years earlier had not been compelled to face the consequences of this 'new method', De Groote did not primarily hold politicians responsible for his mischief. In his opinion, men like Orts and Bassompierre were more to blame. The fact that the threat came from within and from lower echelons in the diplomatic hierarchy, must have

¹³⁰⁸ AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Groote", Paul de Groote to Charles de Broqueville, 17 November 1917.

¹³⁰⁹ AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Groote", Charles de Broqueville to Paul de Groote; 13 December 1917; ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 30, Paul de Groote to Eugène Bastin, 17 December 1917.

¹³¹⁰ See AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Groote", Paul de Groote to Paul Hymans, 3 July 1918.

¹³¹¹ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 141.

added to De Groote's frustration and might have constituted the principal cause for his temporary desire to cut all ties with the diplomatic career.

His decision to nonetheless try to pursue his profession might have been triggered by like-minded colleagues with whom he shared conceptions of diplomacy as a career and as a policy. In the months after his discharge had been decided, De Groote indeed received supporting letters from other senior diplomats and functionaries. In one of these letters, Baron Beyens stated that only the recent death of his mother caused him more grief than having to witness the changes pushed through in Belgium's diplomatic postings and of which he identified De Groote as one of the main victims. "My only comfort", Beyens wrote, "is that I do not carry the responsibility for it and that when I had the authority, I have resisted to these changes with all my power."¹³¹² In another letter, also Jules Van den Heuvel stated to deeply regret the departure of De Groote from Bern. Referring to the changes which had brought him to the Vatican, Van den Heuvel advanced that "this is the second time that the wind of the revolutions blows in Le Havre" and that "there is nothing more dangerous than changing horses while fording."¹³¹³

The sentiments of Beyens and Van den Heuvel contrasted sharply with those of Orts and Bassompierre. The men who henceforth controlled the careers of Belgian diplomats seem to have adopted a rather mocking attitude towards De Groote. Commenting on another of De Groote's requests for an unfunded government occupation, formulated in a letter to Carton de Wiart, Bassompierre wrote in an administrative document to Orts that "Baron de Groote is full of illusions ... He suggested, if I remember correctly, to use his knowledge as an engineer to the profit of the Ministry of Economic Affairs."¹³¹⁴ In his memoirs, Orts described how "years later, as proof of my ingratitude, he [De Groote] still evoked to anyone who wanted to hear the memory of the lunch he had graciously offered me." Using a quote from a contemporary treatise about being a diplomat, Orts then very implicitly suggested that the meal he had at De Groote's residence was actually not up to much.¹³¹⁵

The contrast between the comments of senior diplomats like Beyens and Van den Heuvel and their younger colleagues Orts and Bassompierre indicates that 'the ruin of the old diplomatic corps' was more than a shift of power from one side of a generation gap to another. This power shift indeed not only caused a change in Belgian foreign policy but also

¹³¹² ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 87, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul de Groote, 17 September 1917. See also n° 154, Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy to Paul de Groote, 18 October 1917.

¹³¹³ ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 177, Jules Van den Heuvel to Paul de Groote, 4 October 1917.

¹³¹⁴ AMBZ, PF 139, "Paul de Groote", 'Note pour M. Orts', 11 November 1917.

¹³¹⁵ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 141.

put traditional Belgian diplomatic culture under serious pressure. The structure of meaning through which Belgian diplomats developed their ideas, perceived their interests and acted on both seemed to experience alterations instigated by the new men in charge. Practices of gift-giving, such as offering one's hospitality, seemed to have lost their effectiveness as means of acknowledging each other's membership of the same community and of obliging the recipient towards a benevolent attitude. Likewise, the principle assuring that despite differences of opinion the honour of all members of the community was protected at all times had lost its importance. For Orts and Bassompierre, pushing through a change in Belgian foreign policy away from neutrality overshadowed their possible concerns for the personal honour of Belgian diplomats. In their opinion, De Groote was so much associated with traditional Belgian diplomacy that he had to be removed from Bern. This indeed equated purging the Swiss capital from the traces of Belgian neutrality.

Orts and Bassompierre replaced De Groote with Fernand Peltzer, who had been advisor in Berlin before the war and had since been in charge of the Foreign Ministry's propaganda office.¹³¹⁶ His sudden promotion to a fairly important posting certainly had something to do with his family ties with Orts, whose cousin he had married. More importantly, perhaps, was his pro-Allied stance. Knowing that "the demarches made to Mgr. Marchetti by M. Baron de Groote had certainly not remained unknown to the ministers of the Allied countries", Peltzer strained himself to pick up the pieces. His apparent success in doing so earned him congratulations from the Foreign Ministry.¹³¹⁷

Broqueville and the Press

The many personnel switches inside the *Villa hollandaise* and at the head of Belgium's diplomatic postings seem to have convinced Belgian journalists that it would henceforth be possible and effective to criticize the structure of Belgian diplomacy and the type of diplomats it created. After all, Broqueville was not only Cabinet Chief and Foreign Minister but also the supreme authority in matters of censorship.¹³¹⁸ Would he really oppose articles that actually supported his personnel policy? Moreover, the ideas expressed in newspapers like *Le XXe siècle* and *L'Indépendance belge* were certainly not new. The experience of war, so the journalists seemed to argue, had sizeably increased their pertinence.

¹³¹⁶ ADCB, 1925, 264; ARA, I 222, "Papiers de Groote", n° 238, Fernand Peltzer to Paul de Groote, 24 September 1917.

¹³¹⁷ AMBZ, PF 1418, "Fernand Peltzer", Fernand Peltzer to Charles de Broqueville, 2 October and 18 November 1917; Charles de Broqueville to Fernand Peltzer, 5 December 1917.

¹³¹⁸ LEROY, *La presse belge*, 5-7.

The editors of *L'Indépendance belge* set the ball rolling by publishing a piece in which Belgian diplomats were reproached because they had not seen the war coming. Before the war, journalists of Liberal newspapers such as *La Chronique*, *La Gazette*, and *Het Laatste Nieuws* had already complained that the country's diplomats were incapable of adequately informing the government of imminent threats to Belgian independence. Arguably, the events of August 1914 had painfully revealed the consequences of this incapacity. In late September 1917, one journalist of *L'Indépendance belge* carried this reasoning a little further and implicitly questioned the diplomats' good intentions. Under the heading "The necessity of a Franco-Anglo-Belgian agreement" he wrote that "the majority of the diplomats whom we had charged with informing us about what happened abroad and with defending our foreign interests ... have strained themselves to prove that we feared imaginary dangers." Throughout the article, he consistently recurred to the linguistic opposition between "they" and "us/our(s)", referring respectively to the guilty diplomats and the victimized public. According to the journalist, "they have ceaselessly put themselves out to hide the imminent danger from us, they have ridiculed our apprehension, our fear for the invading Germany." Most Belgian diplomats, he continued, had always opposed strengthening the army by arguing that "Germany only dreams to enrich itself pacifically and that we moreover have a certificate of neutrality."¹³¹⁹ For one, this journalist blamed Belgian diplomats for not having listened to the concerns of the public, which were published in the form of policy recommendations by his colleagues before the war. For another, he clearly adopted the pro-Allied editorial line of *L'Indépendance belge* and even went as far as to establish a direct link between the incapacity of Belgian diplomats to foresee the German invasion in August 1914 and their neutralist stance.¹³²⁰ The 'majority' which he targeted thus equated the group of primarily senior diplomats who had just lost power to a younger generation.

A similar aversion towards neutrality and the diplomats who incarnated this policy had long filled the columns of *Le XXe siècle*. Unlike their colleagues of *L'Indépendance belge*, Neuray and his collaborators did not explicitly accuse Belgian diplomats of having failed to predict the German army's invasion of Belgium. They did, however, tackle the organization of Belgian diplomacy and even came up with blueprints of how the country's foreign service could be reformed.

¹³¹⁹ ANONYMOUS, "La nécessité d'un accord Franco-Anglo-Belge", *L'Indépendance belge*, 28 September 1917.

¹³²⁰ See LEROY, *La presse belge*, 96.

In early October 1917, Neuray used his well-tried method of publishing a letter “scribbled in the cantonment” by a “young war volunteer.” This soldier had apparently used his time away from the trenches to write an elaborate opinion piece of nearly one thousand five hundred words on “The necessary reform of our diplomacy.” Finding that the processes of sending special missions abroad which adopted “an energetic method” and of replacing the heads of important legations with politicians, had made the insufficiencies of the Belgian diplomatic corps patently obvious, he quickly added that this could not be imputed on the diplomats themselves. Rather, the soldier claimed, “the environment where he [the diplomat] was chosen from, the atmosphere that he is subjected to, [and] the functions imposed on him atrophy the organism.”¹³²¹ In less organic terms, not the agents but the structure was to blame.

The soldier showed himself critical for the limited access to the diplomatic career, the system of promotion according to seniority and especially for what these conditions created, namely a “cosmopolitan society gathering around the courts – class of people that recognize each other throughout the entire world, if not from their face [...] then at least from the similitude of their gestures and their words, which make them into citizens of the universe.” Such cosmopolitanism was undemocratic, the author suggested, because “this fairly unnatural and superficial atmosphere masks the specific, active and popular aspect of the working country.” In addition to the constellation of the diplomatic career, “a restrictive neutrality” had always constituted another limitation to the actions of Belgian diplomats. Again rather implicitly, the soldier set about to suggest that also such neutrality was undemocratic. First, he argued that this neutrality had not only operated in the political domain but also in the sphere of economic foreign policy. Now that “our timidity in questions of expansion” no longer dominated the foreign office mind, he then suggested, it finally became possible to imbue Belgian diplomats with a more pro-active attitude. “The conquest of markets will dominate the policy of nations,” he explained, adding that in this process Belgian diplomats had to take the lead. Perhaps, the soldier predicted, “this inevitable evolution will provoke an internal revolution in the decrepit palace where just recently the most supreme solitudes were good manners and the spirit of universal society.” Replacing these “visible satisfactions of amour-propre” with the “mentality of an American businessman”, he believed, “will earn us tangible social achievements that the people will long for.”¹³²²

After having connected the abandonment of neutrality with the predominance of economic diplomacy and having characterized them as features of a democratic foreign

¹³²¹ ANONYMOUS, “La réforme nécessaire de notre diplomatie”, *Le XXe siècle*, 4 October 1917.

¹³²² ANONYMOUS, “La réforme nécessaire”.

policy, the soldier elaborated his solutions for a more pro-active, economically effective and representative Belgian diplomatic corps. These included well-known propositions such as raising diplomatic salaries in order to allow less fortunate but more meritorious candidates to enter the diplomatic corps, and merging the diplomatic, consular and administrative careers. The advanced solutions also included fairly new suggestions such as increasing specialization by having diplomats spend most of their careers in one of five geographical zones and establishing a “college of economic warfare which would provide the general staff for our army of global conquest.” Remarkably enough, in the conclusion of his essay the soldier pronounced his admiration for the German colleagues of the men he was criticizing: “German diplomacy, so brutal, so devoid of scruples, so ‘blundering’, provides us with the example of a marvellous instrument of expansion. Let us profit from the lessons which it gives us every day and for which we pay such a terribly high price, and let us apply in this matter the following war motto: *Let us take from our enemies all the forces that could serve us against them.*”¹³²³

Perfectly compatible with the ideology of Belgian nationalists, the opinion piece of this soldier and its conclusion reveal a Hobbesian conception of diplomacy, departing from a permanent state of war of every nation against every nation.¹³²⁴ Surely, the war alluded to was foremost an economic war. Yet the idea remains that Belgian diplomacy could no longer focus on staying away from conflicts but would have to concentrate its efforts in order to achieve the nation’s expansion, which would inevitably occur at the expense of other nations.

In the following weeks and months, Neuray came back to the issues advanced by the Belgian soldier. The editor of *Le XXe siècle* agreed on all points that the soldier had put forward, recurred to the same association between neutrality and timidity as opposed to the pro-active behaviour expected from Belgian diplomats, and employed similar organic imagery to illustrate how diplomats had lost touch with the people. This becomes clear in the conclusion of one of his articles, which moreover supported Orts’s idea of the conflicting generations of Belgian diplomats: “We have to rejuvenate, vivify this antique house. We have to put its doors and windows wide open, have it penetrated by large streams of new air, and also a little by the rumours in the street, to remind its hosts that outside of the mute life of archives, protocols and memorandums, there is a pounding and creating life.” Yet apart from repeating the soldier’s ideas, Neuray also wished to add some nuance, particularly with regards to the predominance of economic diplomacy. “Now that we are no longer neutral,” he

¹³²³ ANONYMOUS, “La réforme nécessaire”.

¹³²⁴ See JACKSON, Robert, and Georg SORENSSEN, *Introduction to International Relations. Theories and Approaches*, Oxford, 2003, 74-76.

argued, “our representatives abroad will have to uphold – in addition to the commercial interests that in earlier times they were asked to defend foremost – the reputation of honour, loyalty and vitality that the Belgian name has acquired in the world.”¹³²⁵ While ‘honour’ most likely referred to the achievements of the Belgian army and ‘loyalty’ to the pro-Allied policy that the government would henceforth conduct, ‘vitality’ fitted in with the image of the nation as a body which was in need of expansion. If “our diplomacy of tomorrow”, as Neuray titled one of his articles, was to reflect these values, Belgian diplomats would have to obtain a greater Belgium at the coming peace conference for the nation to be satisfied. As such, Neuray and his colleagues had creatively re-interpreted pre-war criticisms of the Belgian diplomatic corps in a way that perfectly suited their annexationist aspirations.

§ 2. Belgian Foreign Policy and the Budding of New Diplomacy

Just before he left the Foreign Ministry, Beyens decided to send his political, or rather diplomatic testament to the King and to the members of the government. Referring to the Soviet peace formula which the Russian government had adopted a few months earlier, Beyens argued that the peoples of Europe would not condone a peace settlement based on annexations. He specified that the Belgian government could still rightfully demand complete indemnities but did best not to push for territorial acquisitions, even with respect to Luxemburg. While Beyens had long favoured an Allied treaty of guarantee as the best means to safeguard Belgium’s independence, he now believed that the entry of the United States in the war would eventually lead to a league of democracies preserving the terms of the peace and that this league would constitute the best future guarantee for the country’s security.¹³²⁶ Already in the Spring of 1917, Beyens had become convinced that the February Revolution and the American entry into the war had increased the chances for a durable peace. As Michael Palo has argued, Beyens regarded the continuation of war rather than the powers of socialism and democracy as the main threats to the European social fabric.¹³²⁷

¹³²⁵ PERCY, “Notre diplomatie de demain”, *Le XXe siècle*, 16 October 1917. According to Marie Leroy, ‘Percy’ was one of Neuray’s pseudonyms. See LEROY, *La presse belge*, 59. See also NEURAY, Fernand, “A bâtons rompus...”, *Le XXe siècle*, 1 December 1917.

¹³²⁶ I have used the summary in PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 240.

¹³²⁷ PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 240 and 271-272; WADE, Rex A., *The Russian Search for Peace, February-October 1917*, Stanford, 1969, 51. For the text of Beyens’s memorandum, see 1914-1918, n° 269, “Note transmise par Baron Beyens – Conditions de paix, 1917”, s.d. [July 1917].

Old and New Diplomacy

As such, Beyens was not ill-disposed towards at least some of the precepts of what would become known as the ‘New Diplomacy’. In an old but still invaluable study of how these principles came to dominate the rhetoric of political leaders in Europe and the United States in the last year of the war, Arno J. Mayer argues that this process resulted from the dialogue within warring countries between “the forces of order”, meaning primarily conservative political actors, and “the forces of movement”, meaning primarily progressive political actors. The forces of order clung to what contemporaries labelled as the ‘Old Diplomacy’, whose methods of secretly formulating and negotiating war aims were closely connected with its aims of annexing territory and establishing spheres of influence. Conversely, the forces of movement opposed this kind of secret diplomacy, advocating instead that the formulation of war aims should be subjected to debate in parliament and the press. They indeed believed that the masses would share their primary goal, namely a peace without annexations and indemnities on the basis of national self-determination. Following the political truce decided in most European countries immediately upon the outbreak of war, so Mayer argues, the forces of order consolidated their power and dominated European diplomacy until early 1917. As one of the main reasons for their success, Mayer identifies an “overwhelming wave of nationalism” which led the majority of the formerly pacifist forces of movement to lend their enthusiastic support of the war. Yet, Mayer argues, in Autumn 1917 the balance was tipped in favour of the forces of movement. In November 1917, Lenin had published his Decree of Peace. This text propagated principles of the New Diplomacy which at the same time were gaining ground among public opinions in German, Austro-Hungarian, French and British societies. The American President Woodrow Wilson, who genuinely supported these ideas, and the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who accepted them selectively and with considerable reluctance, now felt the time had come to publicly support the platform for the new diplomacy and to ‘liberalize’ its ideas in order to direct them against the more authoritarian Central Powers. According to Mayer, this is why in early January 1918 Lloyd George reformulated British war aims in a non-annexationist way during a speech delivered before a Labour audience and why Wilson set himself up as the champion of the methods of the New Diplomacy in his Fourteen Points speech.¹³²⁸

As the contents of Beyens’s diplomatic testament suggests, Mayer’s theory does not apply to the Belgian case. In this small and neutral state the forces of order certainly favoured

¹³²⁸ MAYER, *Political Origins*, 1-58 and 368-392. See also SOFER, “Old and New Diplomacy”, 197-199 and 202-203; HUGHES, *Diplomacy before the Russian Revolution*, 1-18 and 200-207.

the methods of Old Diplomacy but not its aims. As Foreign Minister, Beyens had indeed come to symbolize these conservative forces in Belgian diplomacy. The diplomat appreciated the ‘no annexations’ word of order associated with the New Diplomacy. Yet he disliked its methods, which in addition to conducting diplomacy in the public sphere, comprised appealing to the services of elected politicians rather than leaving diplomacy to men of the profession.¹³²⁹ In opposing the annexationist propaganda of his compatriots, Beyens had indeed always stressed that it was very unwise to formulate such war aims in newspapers and other publications. Of course, he had left Le Havre and exercised no more influence on Belgian foreign policy. At first sight and in sharp contrast with the exiled Foreign Minister, the men who henceforth conducted the country’s international relations seem to have favoured some of the methods but not the aims of the New Diplomacy. They had indeed always stimulated the propaganda of annexationist war aims. In a way, Broqueville and Renkin represented the forces of movement who sailed on the nationalist wave caused by the First World War. Inside the Foreign Ministry, junior diplomats and officials like Orts and Bassompierre had long internalized these nationalist and annexationist ideas.

Perhaps Mayer holds a somewhat excessively normative idea of democracy. Like Wilson, Belgian nationalists, too, adopted the discourse of democracy to justify their foreign policy ideas. For them, however, democracy did not presuppose working towards the inherently pacifist and internationalist aspirations of the people. They indeed believed that the people, or rather the nation, whose ‘true’ desire they hoped to materialize, demanded that they worked towards a greater Belgium, which was the only acceptable result of a struggle which had manifested the Belgians’ vitality. This is not to say that all the Belgians in exile who represented the forces of movement became pervaded with nationalist ideas. However, at the time when Mayer situated the breakthrough of these forces, in Belgian political and press circles their voices sounded less and less loudly.

For more than two years after the editors of *L’Indépendance belge* had moved to London in Autumn 1914, their newspaper voiced the fiercest criticisms on traditional diplomatic practice.¹³³⁰ At least until the last months of 1916, the most important Belgian press organ on the British Isles indeed provided a platform for what Mayer labelled the forces of movement. Not all of these forces had lent their enthusiastic support to the national war effort.

¹³²⁹ MAYER, *Political Origins*, 14.

¹³³⁰ In addition to the articles discussed below, see Y.A.D., “Tribune Libre. Les gouvernements des pères de famille”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 13 December 1915; and ANONYMOUS, “Grande Bretagne. Chambre des Communes. Un discours de Sir E. Grey”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 26 May 1916.

In the absence of the Senate, Henri La Fontaine published his charges against secret diplomacy in *L'Indépendance belge*. La Fontaine's pre-war predictions had materialized and this had angered him. "Politicians and diplomats", La Fontaine fulminated in April 1915, "are medieval sorcerers, and [...] look for the solutions of sociology's vital problems in vile mixtures of blood, crime, murder, lies, and terror." According to La Fontaine, "from the repulsive kettle where they triturate corpses of men, women, and children, they hope to make rise the philosophical stone, which has to bring wealth to them and enrichment to those who have permitted them, with an aim of selfish and monstrous lucre, to accomplish their satanic and bloodthirsty task." La Fontaine then explained what needed to happen so that the tragedy of the current war would not repeat itself. For one, he argued, "all those who are imbued with the ancient methods of the politics of domination and hegemony, who are the tenants and the deformed of caste-diplomacy, have to be excluded from the deliberations of the future peace." For another, he continued, "only open-hearted and loyal men should be called upon to represent the democracies which will finally be liberated from their blissful admiration for royal, diplomatic and political dynasties." La Fontaine concluded that "we are at the dawn of new times" and "to have them break through we need new men."¹³³¹

Internationalist Socialists such as La Fontaine did not impute the prime responsibility for the outbreak of war to the German nation. Rather, they attributed it to the scheming of an elite of diplomats and politicians who appeared as devilish creatures cooking up potions based on secret formulas which would bring doom over mankind. In the eyes of La Fontaine, secrecy were the methods, bellicose war-mongering aristocrats the agents, darkness the atmosphere, and personal gain the aims of traditional diplomacy. Arguably, the new kind of diplomacy which La Fontaine advocated required openness, pacifist democrats, clarity, and striving towards the common good. Associating on the one hand old diplomacy with sorcery and on the other hand new diplomacy with sociology, La Fontaine illustrates how the forces of movement perceived the scientific study of international relations as one of the necessary preconditions of maintaining a durable peace.¹³³²

La Fontaine gained support from the Catholic MP Eugène Standaert and from the Liberal lawyer Jules Coucke, who in their descriptions of traditional diplomacy recurred to similar metaphors and provided the details about the functioning of this new diplomacy that La Fontaine had specified before the war in the Senate but – possibly due to his excitement –

¹³³¹ LA FONTAINE, Henri, "La Guerre. Creuset d'idées", *L'Indépendance belge*, 9 April 1915.

¹³³² These ideas would lead to the scientification of international politics and the birth of IR Studies as a discipline after the war. See RIEMENS, *De passie voor vrede*, 292-358.

failed to mention in his April 1915 article. Standaert and Coucke explained that it was not a case of the people being directly consulted about foreign policy making but rather by means of their parliaments.¹³³³ “The evil”, Standaert argued, “resides in the antinomy between parliaments, as public organs of the popular power, and diplomacy, as the occult organ of the executive power.” He explained that “the peoples are masters of their destinies, [...] but alas! diplomacy disposes of these destinies, outside and in spite of the parliaments.”¹³³⁴ Yet when it came to establishing the guilt of individual diplomats, Standaert and Coucke adopted a much more moderate tone. Standaert deemed “exaggerated” the many attacks on diplomats for having caused the war. He also claimed to have met many diplomats about whom he could only say good things. “It is not with the diplomats we have to pick a quarrel,” Standaert claimed, “but with diplomacy as an institution based on intrigues and secrecy.”¹³³⁵ Coucke recurred to exactly the same reasoning, arguing that “it is not a matter of accusing the diplomats themselves who in private are without doubt perfectly honest people, but to put the system, the institution, the diplomatic organism to trial.”¹³³⁶ Just like the nationalist journalists of *Le XXe siècle* did in the case of the Belgian diplomats’ incompetence to defend the country’s interests, internationalists like Standaert and Coucke blamed the structure rather than the agents. The guilt question, of course, referred to very different conditions and revealed very different views on Belgian diplomats and diplomacy in general. In the eyes of Standaert, for instance, future peace could only be safeguarded by increasing the power of political entities with a controlling function such as parliament and by curtailing the power of the executive.

Belgian nationalist voices rather favoured strengthening the executive power. Before the Spring of 1917, also some of these found their expression on the pages of *L’Indépendance belge*. One of them belonged to a collaborator who went by the telling pseudonym Compère Guilleri, referring to a demobilised soldier after the French wars of religion who continued to fight and meanwhile pillaged the countryside.¹³³⁷ In his column ‘Coups de plume’ Guilleri revealed that he had fairly different expectations of diplomats and diplomacy. On the very day that Henri La Fontaine published his fierce indictment against traditional diplomatic practice on the frontpage of *L’Indépendance belge*, Guilleri wrote at the bottom of page three that “if the silence of diplomacy has often exasperated us, the gossip of newspapers annoys us as

¹³³³ COUCKE, Jules, “Si Les Peuples Savaient... La Diplomatie”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 21 August 1915. See also COUCKE, Jules, “Le Problème de la Paix”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 13 December 1916.

¹³³⁴ STANDAERT, Eugène, “La Sainte-Alliance”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 30 July 1915.

¹³³⁵ STANDAERT, “La Sainte-Alliance”.

¹³³⁶ COUCKE, “Si Les Peuples Savaient”.

¹³³⁷ CORVISIER, André, and Hervé COUTAU-BÉGARIE, *La guerre. Essais historiques*, Paris, 1995, 191.

much as that of cabaret strategists.” According to him, “we indeed talk too much about the neutrals.” This irritated Guilleri because he felt that there was no need to convince neutral countries such as Italy and the United States to enter the war on the side of the Allies. “Is it really necessary,” the journalist wondered, “to invite so many people to our next family dinner?” Guilleri was, however, satisfied to note that “at least this time the diplomats – of whom so many bad things have been said at the start of this war – have been the wisest: they do not say anything.”¹³³⁸ Guilleri’s comments reveal that he believed that public scrutiny of foreign policy was only effective if it served the nationalist cause. Apparently, in other cases he preferred the more traditional diplomatic method of keeping the silence. Moreover, Guilleri did seem to fully cling to traditional diplomacy where its aims were concerned. The family dinner he wrote about indeed refers not only to the metaphor of eating the opponent but also to that of dividing the cake once the opponent has been defeated.

In a contribution published about six months later in the same column, Guilleri rendered his annexationist sympathies explicit. He deeply regretted that “the diplomats had not promised us any territorial aggrandizement; and neither have we claimed our lands of Limburg, the Eiffel and Luxemburg.” While governments in the Balkans had struck very good deals before entering into the war, he explained, “our country has been noble” by fighting without demands. “It is good to keep repeating this [Belgium’s noble attitude] to ourselves,” he sarcastically remarked, “so that we will not forget it, because the world is turning today towards these Rastaquouere nations and Renown is abandoning us.”¹³³⁹ Guilleri clearly saw the war as a struggle between nations, some of which he pointedly regarded as inferior to others. He also seemed to believe that this struggle created possibilities, which to his regret Belgium had as yet failed to grasp.

In the course of 1917, readers of *L’Indépendance belge* who had an interest in the system of diplomatic practice would have noticed that the newspaper’s pages no longer contained indictments of secret diplomacy similar to those which had filled its columns over the previous years. Conversely, Guilleri’s implicit pleas for an annexationist foreign policy gradually gained support from other contributors to the newspaper. In the Summer of 1916 the editors of *L’Indépendance belge* had still urged their readers “not to diminish our good cause by annexationist dreams”, because “such cause would lose its value when during battles, a people thinks of exploiting its misfortunes in order to take the goods of its neighbour or even

¹³³⁸ COMPÈRE GUILLERI, “Echos. Coups de plume”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 9 April 1915.

¹³³⁹ COMPÈRE GUILLERI, “Echos. Coups de plume”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 21 October 1915.

enemy.”¹³⁴⁰ By early 1918, the director of the journal had apparently changed his mind and henceforth annexationist articles found their way to *L'Indépendance belge*.¹³⁴¹ In the Summer of 1918, he even allowed his collaborator ‘Senior’ to convey a message which was diametrically opposed to the one published two years earlier. Senior indeed pleaded for “the return of our ancient Belgian provinces” among which he counted Zeeland Flanders.¹³⁴²

Admittedly, the number of annexationist articles in *L'Indépendance belge* remained fairly limited. Nevertheless, the simultaneous absence of anti-annexationist articles and pieces which condemned the practices of traditional diplomacy at least suggests that “the mouthpiece of Belgians in London”, as the newspaper was labelled in the *New York Times*, had made a U-turn in this regard.¹³⁴³ Could it be that the editors had realized that their current sympathy for annexationism as one of old diplomacy’s aims was not consonant with providing a platform for voices urging for a new kind of international relations which did not accept claims for territorial aggrandizement which ignored the self-determination of the peoples? Another explanation would be that the editors chose to follow the newspaper’s principal promoters who had made a similar turn, such as Jules Destrée and the future Foreign Minister Paul Hymans.¹³⁴⁴

At any rate, similar developments were nowhere near to be found in the most widely read press organ of the Belgians abroad. Throughout the war, journalists of *Le XXe siècle* indeed never criticized the methods of traditional diplomacy and consistently published annexationist articles. The frequency of these publications did, however, sizeably diminish in 1917, as did the openly annexationist tone of the articles. This had nothing to do with the passion for territorial expansion of *Le XXe siècle*’s contributors but all with the tightening of censorship. Neuray’s campaign for the incorporation of Luxemburg, Zeeland Flanders, Dutch Limburg and part of the German Rhineland had reached its height in the Summer of 1916. Around that time, Dutch complaints about the campaign had compelled the Belgian government to sign a declaration stating that it would prohibit the publication of annexationist articles in Belgian press organs. Surely, this did not prevent Neuray and his collaborators from continuing to convey their message. However, from then on they did so in a much more implicit way, for instance by introducing these claims in ‘historical’ discussions and in

¹³⁴⁰ ANONYMOUS, “La question des annexions”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 28 June 1916.

¹³⁴¹ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 417-418.

¹³⁴² SENIOR, “À propos d’un mémoire sur la neutralité future de la Belgique”, *L'Indépendance belge*, 11 September 1918.

¹³⁴³ Marie Leroy counted five articles in 266 editions of *L'Indépendance belge* published in 1918 and found no article conveying an anti-annexationist message. See LEROY, *La presse belge*, 97-98. See also *The New York Times Current History*, 1081.

¹³⁴⁴ LEROY, *La presse belge*, 84.

accounts of manifestations of public opinion in Allied countries, in occupied Belgium, and at the front.¹³⁴⁵

When Broqueville took over the Foreign Ministry in August 1917, he was still directly in charge of the Belgian censorship commission and took the occasion to formulate as a policy that newspapers could write about “the prospective reunion (the word annexation cannot be printed) of those parts of Belgium which in the past have been taken through violence or through diplomacy despite the protests of the annexed population.” Whereas these instructions left considerable room for interpretation and might have been thusly conceived by Broqueville to accommodate his friend Neuray, the latter seemingly returned the favour by further reducing the frequency and by further moderating the tone of *Le XXe siècle*'s already covertly annexationist articles. This would indeed strengthen the international position of Broqueville as Belgian Foreign Minister and increased his favour with the King. Perhaps Neuray would have personally preferred pursuing his policy of publishing openly annexationist pieces, but his loyalty to Broqueville seemed to prevail. This loyalty rooted not only in the Cabinet Chief's preferential treatment and financial support of *Le XXe siècle*, but also in Neuray's nationalist ideology, which included the establishment of a great ‘national’ party which would reduce the authority of parliament, curtail the influence of political parties and strengthening the power of the executive. Neuray saw Broqueville as the ideal authoritarian leader of both the party and the executive.¹³⁴⁶ Possibly through the kind offices of the editor of *Le XXe siècle*, the Cabinet Chief managed to obtain that also the annexationist newspapers in the Netherlands tempered the tone and contents of their articles.¹³⁴⁷

By the time Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson publicly advocated the principles of a new kind of international relations, which would have to be based on publicity, openness and co-operation amongst nations and peoples, censorship tried but could not completely hide that most representatives of the Belgian press more than ever clung to a foreign policy oriented towards annexations.

As it seemed, this stance met with the tacit approval of the new Foreign Minister and his closest collaborators. Through his personnel policy, Broqueville had indeed given the impression that Belgian diplomacy would henceforth consist in a pro-Allied policy aimed at obtaining territorial expansions. Regardless of his personal policy preferences, the Cabinet

¹³⁴⁵ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 403-411.

¹³⁴⁶ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 392-399 and 409. The quote is on p. 409.

¹³⁴⁷ AMBZ, 15.911, “Services extérieurs 1858-1919”, Albert de Ligne to Albert de Broqueville, 23 November 1917.

Chief was indeed well aware that only this stance would gain him the necessary support from within the Foreign Ministry.

This does not necessarily mean that Belgian diplomats actually liked witnessing annexationist aspirations being publicly proclaimed by politicians and publicists. Many diplomats – especially those who stood close to Beyens and Van der Elst – disapproved of these propaganda methods. They endorsed the methodology of traditional diplomacy, which counted discretion among its fundamental characteristics. Of course, their embeddedness in the culture of contemporary international relations had also made them consider redrawings of the map of Europe as an almost natural consequence of war. Telling in this regard are the comments of Gaston de Ramaix in a letter to Beyens in which he expressed his regret for the latter's resignation as Foreign Minister. De Ramaix, then advisor at the legation in London, described the July 1917 sessions of the Houses of Parliament as “real oratory displays of power”. Apparently, for many days leading politicians of different denominations had been interpellating and questioning each other about British war aims. “Peace,” it appeared to Ramaix, “instead of being discussed behind closed doors like before, is discussed *coram publico* [in public].” This Ramaix found a “strange spectacle”. Referring to “another great speech” Lloyd George was resolved to deliver, the diplomat sceptically wondered whether such “competition of eloquence” would really facilitate the conclusion of peace. Ramaix also commented on the contents of the discussion. “For the moment everyone tries to make his adversary abandon his annexationist dreams,” he noted, predicting that “once this devilish tragedy will finally be over, a historian will write, like after the Hundred Years' War, that it was really not worth the effort to fight so long for such a minimal geographic modification.”¹³⁴⁸

In the company of the Foreign Ministry's leading personnel, Broqueville certainly paid lip service to the foreign policy that Orts and Bassompierre identified with. In his diaries, Bassompierre commented on the diplomatic conference in Paris where Broqueville had taken Orts to in July 1917. According to the Political Director, “Broq[ueville] said a few words that Orts had prepared concerning the necessity for Belgium to meet with her guarantors alone soon in order to rebuild the smashed up treaties of [18]39.” However, it is highly doubtful if Broqueville's message to Lloyd George, which amounted to abolishing Belgian neutrality and foremost to reconsidering the country's northern and eastern borders, would have met with the approval of his recipient. The conversation indeed took place on the day before Ramaix

¹³⁴⁸ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 48b, Gaston de Ramaix to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 30 July 1917.

informed Beyens about Lloyd George's public condemnations of expansionist war aims. Luckily for Belgian annexationists, the British Prime Minister was not really listening to what Broqueville had to say. As Orts had told Bassompierre, "Lloyd George was chatting the while with [the British Foreign Minister] Balfour & asked his secretary all at a sudden 'What does he say'." To this, the secretary had apparently replied: "He says that he loves us very much."¹³⁴⁹ Orts attributed Lloyd George's disinterest to the fact that besides of Belgian war aims Broqueville "spoke of all sorts of other things" as well to the Foreign Minister. Unlike Ramaix and Beyens, who had fully realized that the wind in London was not blowing towards annexations, it would take until late December 1917 before the advocates of territorial expansion inside the Belgian Foreign Ministry even began to perceive that the British government had moved much closer, at least in their rhetoric, towards the aims of New Diplomacy. By then, extracts of speeches by Lloyd George, Balfour and other Ministers had reached the *Villa hollandaise*. As it appeared to Bassompierre, "Balfour almost apologized for having ever thought of giving Constantinople to Russia" and "disclaimed ever having thought of snatching left bank of Rhine from Germany." The contents of these and other speeches astonished the Political Director, and not just him, as he wrote "Is England wavering? Such is the question on all lips at ministry: Orts, Borchg[rave], Guill[aume] & myself."¹³⁵⁰ Could it be that these men were so imbued with the idea that wars which ended with the unconditional surrender of one party always led to this party's loss of territory, that they failed to grasp that the British renunciation of this idea did not necessarily mean that London was willing to work towards a negotiated and thus conditional peace?

The Diplomacy of Broqueville

Broqueville, for his part, was well aware of the connection that his collaborators made between annexationist war aims and a pro-Allied policy which came down to fighting the German army *jusqu'au bout*, that is until its unconditional surrender. He also expressed himself in this way before the representative of the French government in Le Havre. With reference to the August 1917 papal peace initiative, the Cabinet Chief declared to Klobukowski that even if the German government offered the Belgian government "all it can possibly desire", he would never accept any solution which was not approved of beforehand by Paris and London.¹³⁵¹ As such, there seemed to be no immediate reasons why everything

¹³⁴⁹ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 29 July 1917.

¹³⁵⁰ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 21 December 1917.

¹³⁵¹ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 603-604.

would not be peachy keen both amongst Belgian foreign policy executives and in their relations with the Allied powers.

Yet this was bound to change. The King of the Belgians indeed held very different foreign policy views. Due to his large degree of access to Albert, Broqueville knew this better than any of his colleagues. Like Beyens, he had to manoeuvre between on the hand a pro-Allied, *jusqu'au bout*-policy that suited the likes of Orts and Bassompierre in the Foreign Ministry and of annexationists such as Renkin and Hymans in the government, and on the other hand a policy that accommodated Albert's desire to end the war as soon as possible, even if this required a separate, negotiated peace with the German government. Unlike Beyens, Broqueville did not try to look for compromises between these so-called 'two policies'. Instead, he conducted two very different policies, one with the knowledge of Orts and Bassompierre (and which he left largely to them) and one without.

Already in late January 1917, the Belgian industrialist Baron Évence Coppée contacted his friend Broqueville and the King about his conversations with Baron Oscar von der Lancken, head of the political section of the German military command in Brussels. At these occasions, Von der Lancken had informed Coppée that the German emperor and chancellor wished to negotiate the restoration of Belgian independence. Broqueville and the King turned down the offer. However, in June 1917 more detailed peace feelers in which also the widow of a former Officer of the Belgian Royal Household was involved, did lead the Cabinet Chief to accept to meet with Von der Lancken. With a view of organizing a secret peace conference in which representatives of all warring countries would take part, Broqueville also contacted Aristide Briand, who had combined the functions of French Cabinet Chief and Foreign Minister until a few months earlier. Due to unforeseen circumstances, a planned encounter between Broqueville and Von der Lancken in early July was called off at the last moment, but the Cabinet Chief did meet with Briand two months later. A prospected meeting between Briand and Von der Lancken would take place in Switzerland, were it not that the French Foreign Minister Alexandre Ribot found out and even threatened to court-martial his successor for high treason. On 22 September 1917, Ribot talked to Gaiffier, denouncing the involvement of Broqueville and telling the diplomat that go-betweens had managed to communicate about the affair using the stamp of the Belgian legation in Paris. Gaiffier claimed not to know anything about this.¹³⁵²

¹³⁵² The most complete account of these peace feelers is to be found in HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 589-596 and 607-610. Haag does tend to overemphasize the moral righteousness of Broqueville in this episode. Albeit to a minor extent, Velaers does the same for Albert and uses very dubious sources, such as the memoirs of

Several historians have briefly mentioned what Gaiffier did with this information.¹³⁵³ Only one, however, provided the details and an interpretation, or rather a judgment. Henri Haag claims that Gaiffier first promised to Ribot to make sure that if go-betweens tried to transmit any other messages relating to the secret conversations, he would immediately inform the French Foreign Ministry. The diplomat kept his promise. When two days later a go-between delivered a message to the legation, he immediately informed the French Secretary-General Jules Cambon. According to Haag, only now did Gaiffier acquaint Broqueville with Ribot's rejection of the secret peace feelers. Yet he did not say anything about Ribot's ill disposition towards the Cabinet Chief, nor about the promise he had made to the French Foreign Minister, and neither about the fact that he had already lived up to this promise once. Trying to explain Gaiffier's actions, Haag argues that the diplomat had felt deeply offended because Broqueville had not acquainted him with his secret projects. Apart from that, Haag continues, "the minister of Belgium in Paris served two masters." Broqueville's biographer clearly meant that Gaiffier was disloyal to the Belgian Foreign Minister by satisfying the wishes of Ribot. However, he does not explain why Gaiffier would have chosen to do so. Haag could, for instance, have invoked the diplomat's identification with a pro-Allied *jusqu'au bout*-policy, or his awareness that this episode could well mean the end of Broqueville's Foreign Ministership and that, for his own career's sake, it was much more important to be on good foot with the leading officials at the Department than with the Foreign Minister. These were, most likely, also the reasons why Gaiffier had immediately informed Orts about the whole affair. Haag, however, limited himself to passing a poor judgment on Gaiffier's magnanimity. He did the same when evaluating how Cambon reacted to the information he had received from Gaiffier. According to Haag, Cambon was the absolute master of the French Foreign Ministry. Even Ribot was a mere "instrument" in the French Secretary-General's hands. Haag argues that Cambon considered "an intolerable humiliation" to have been left out of the secret negotiations between Broqueville, Briand, and Von der Lancken because "he wanted to be and believed he was the inspiration of French Foreign policy." That he was outmanoeuvred "by the little Belgians", Haag continues, was even less bearable for Cambon. If he would have been invited to take part in the peace feelers,

the Belgian King's daughter Marie-José, and those of the French diplomat Anthony Klobukowski, to confirm his claims. See VELAERS, *Albert I*, 328-329 and 332. In a similar vein, although less substantiated, see WILLEQUET, *Albert I*, 111.

¹³⁵³ See THIELEMANS, "Albert entre guerre et paix", 117; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 332; DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 137.

Haag concludes, the Secretary-General would definitely have accepted, albeit under the condition that he could play a major part in them.¹³⁵⁴

There are two main problems with Haag's biography of Broqueville. The above passage is an illustration of the first of these problems. In constructing the most favourable image possible of his protagonist, the author indeed tends to endow the antagonists with poor moral qualities. Another problem, which I have illustrated in Chapter Seven, is that Haag deliberately ignores information that puts Broqueville in a bad light. As Michael Palo has shown, this included consciously omitting negative appreciations by contemporaries of the Cabinet Chief's personal qualities.¹³⁵⁵ It also applied to situations in which Broqueville defended himself against such allegations. Haag does indeed not cite a letter in which the Cabinet Chief told the King that Cambon had attacked his suitability as a negotiator. Yet this letter, which Haag must have seen, sheds light on how Broqueville perceived the reactions of Cambon and also adds to understanding Gaiffier's insubordination. On 26 September 1917, Broqueville wrote that someone told him that Cambon worried about his "forward character" and the fact that he did not have "sufficient sense of the possibilities." The Cabinet Chief claimed to know where this was coming from, as he declared to the King: "I think there is some Beyens in there, because this is [...] a sentiment he manifested every time that I reproached him for letting himself be circumvented by the sly fox that is Cambon."¹³⁵⁶

As it seemed, Broqueville believed that Beyens had incited his good friend Cambon to avenge him by having the Secretary-General convey the message that he, as a leading representative of French foreign policy, deemed the Belgian Foreign Minister unsuitable for diplomatic negotiations. Broqueville apparently tried to minimize these allegations before the King would hear of them through other sources. Although it cannot be excluded that Beyens would have solicited this gesture from Cambon, there are no indications that he actually did. All we know is that there existed a firm friendship between both senior diplomats and that Cambon had asked Beyens to meet him in Paris before he left for Biarritz.¹³⁵⁷ Perhaps the sight of his humiliated friend incited Cambon to honour his friendship with Beyens by proactively discrediting Broqueville in the way the Cabinet Chief had discredited Beyens. More generally, the manner in which Beyens had been removed gained him a lot of solidarity from other members of the international community of diplomats. In his diaries, Bassompierre

¹³⁵⁴ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 611, 615-617 and 626-627.

¹³⁵⁵ PALO, *The Question of Neutrality*, 273.

¹³⁵⁶ AKP, AE, n° 61, Charles de Broqueville to Albert de Belgique, 26 September 1917.

¹³⁵⁷ For the correspondence between Beyens and Cambon in this period, see AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 23, 'Lettres diverses, notamment de Jules Cambon, 1915-1932'. See also in the same archive n° 48, Jules Cambon to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 18 and 26 July 1917.

gives a nice overview of their reactions. When in mid-July 1917 Sir Francis Villiers, the British representative in Le Havre, came to see him about the crisis in the government, Bassompierre tried his best to justify Beyens's imminent removal. "Be[yens] is moderate, compared to the feeling of the country," the future Political Director admitted, explaining that "he does not share enough in the temper of the country, which is one of deep hatred." These nationalist arguments failed to convince Villiers, even after Bassompierre went to see him once more in order to make him understand the annexationist point of view. Villiers limited himself to stating that "Beyens's views were sound." The Italian representative Carignani had told Bassompierre that he was not at all surprised about Beyens's departure, arguing that because of the hostility of politicians diplomats stood no chance in governments. Carignani had even congratulated Beyens for having survived for two years. The Dutch representative Van Weede reacted differently. According to Bassompierre, he was "furious with the petty politicians who had brought Beyens down."¹³⁵⁸

Albeit to different degrees, these diplomats all condemned the way Beyens had been pushed aside by Broqueville and they formulated their disapproval in terms of the rising antagonism between the worlds of politics and diplomacy. Such manoeuvres indeed threatened traditional diplomatic culture in the sense that they jeopardized not only the career perspectives of diplomats but also the norms and values which had long guided the conduct of international relations and which most senior diplomats swore by. In the cases of Cambon and Gaiffier, this rising antagonism provided the framework through which their personal loyalties to Baron Beyens only intensified. Surely, for both diplomats strategic and political-ideological interests might have constituted stronger motivations for their wish to oust Broqueville, but the culture of solidarity between neutral and Allied diplomats from different countries also had its influence. At any rate, Gaiffier and Cambon, respectively by informing Orts about Broqueville's secret negotiations and by spreading the rumour of the French Foreign Ministry's antipathy towards the Cabinet Chief, had planted the seed which would lead to the removal of Broqueville.

The Elimination of Broqueville

With the notable exception of Henri Haag, traditional historiography has overemphasized the roles of politicians such as Hymans and Renkin in ousting Broqueville from the Foreign

¹³⁵⁸ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 15, 16, and 19 July 1917.

Ministry. In this way, they have tended to minimize the parts played by diplomats such as Cambon, Gaiffier and especially Orts. More than Cambon and Gaiffier indeed, Orts wanted to have Broqueville removed as head of Belgian foreign policy.¹³⁵⁹ To achieve this goal, Orts forwarded the information he received from Gaiffier immediately to the King, whom he believed knew nothing about the matter.¹³⁶⁰ He then wrote to Broqueville a long letter in which he suggested that he felt betrayed because in private conversations the Cabinet Chief had endorsed his clearly expounded views of a Belgian foreign policy which included rejecting peace offers from Germany for the time being and immediately communicating these proposals to the Allies. Orts claimed to feel particularly offended because Broqueville's behaviour had given rise to Allied suspicions which also affected him. There was only one remedy, Orts found, namely a resolute choice "between two policies." This was a clear reference to what used to be labelled the policy of the King as opposed to the policy of the government, and now implied working towards a separate peace with Germany versus following the Allied lead. Orts, of course, did not label the former as the King's policy. He indeed seemed to believe that Albert was unaware and therefore demanded that Broqueville arranged him an audience in De Panne.¹³⁶¹ The King invited Orts a week later and immediately made clear to him that he had no strong feelings about the affair. Surely, Albert admitted, Broqueville had been reckless and he had not told the truth. The Cabinet Chief had, however, remained loyal to the French government. Orts will probably have expected the contents of the King's reply. Via Ingenbleek, Albert had indeed already made clear that he found the Secretary-General "too obstinate towards his chief."¹³⁶²

In his memoirs, Orts claimed that he came to know very quickly that the King had already been acquainted with the peace feelers in which Broqueville was involved. Yet writing in the late 1930s and adding comments in the mid-1950s, Orts strained himself to justify Albert's attitude. The King certainly did not wish to conclude a separate peace, let alone that he wanted to act without the prior knowledge of the Allies, Orts argued. The blame, he suggested, was entirely on Broqueville.¹³⁶³ At the time, however, Orts felt very differently. In a letter to Hymans written in mid-October 1917, he claimed that the royal audience had not satisfied him at all and even perplexed him.¹³⁶⁴ A month later, Orts confided to Bassompierre

¹³⁵⁹ SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 141-153; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 332-335; DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 131-145.

¹³⁶⁰ THIELEMANS, "Albert entre guerre et paix", 117.

¹³⁶¹ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 426, Pierre Orts to Charles de Broqueville, 4 October 1917.

¹³⁶² ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 426, Pierre Orts to Paul Hymans, 17 October 1917.

¹³⁶³ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 84-86.

¹³⁶⁴ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 426, Pierre Orts to Paul Hymans, 17 October 1917.

that he saw the King as “the inspirer of a policy which has been going on under v[an] d[er] Elst, Beyens and now Broqueville.” The consequences would be terrible if the Allies found out about the royal disposition, Orts believed. “Someone must make him understand,” he added, that the “policy of neutrality, of humouring the enemy, of keeping the Allies aloof [...] hurts the unanimous sentiments of the Belgians.” By early December 1917, rumours about Orts’s opinion on Albert’s foreign policy views had reached the King. Orts claimed to be “represented to [the] King as making a campaign against His Majesty.” This were apparently the doings of “people who repeat things to [the] King, and distort them.”¹³⁶⁵

In earlier times, such a loss of the royal favour could well have marked the end of a diplomat’s career. By December 1917, however, the King no longer decided about the fate of individual diplomats. Even his influence in appointing Foreign Ministers had effectively waned. Not only Broqueville but also Orts had been instrumental in bringing about this shift of power from the monarchy to the government, and that due to his machinations to remove the Cabinet Chief as Foreign Minister.

As Henri Haag argues, Orts had left his audience with the King at a time when only few Belgian personalities knew about the incident caused by the secret negotiations. According to Haag, instead of showing the discretion and the fidelity to Broqueville that his functions required, the Secretary-General decided to inform his friends Hymans and Renkin.¹³⁶⁶ Arguing that Broqueville had completely lost the confidence of the *Quai d’Orsay*, he even incited them to do all they could to have Broqueville removed from the Foreign Ministry. To Hymans he wrote that Broqueville would have to be “executed” because otherwise the disastrous policy which had dominated Belgian diplomacy since before the war would be pursued. Orts also warned his friend that the King probably thought of one particular “ministrable” who would definitely continue this policy, namely “Jules (de Rome)” meaning Van den Heuvel. If Hymans would let this happen, he argued, “we are damned.” Perhaps to further stimulate Hymans’s zeal, Orts concluded his letter stating that he would go if Broqueville remained Foreign Minister.¹³⁶⁷ To Bassompierre, Orts explained that he could no longer work “with a man who is reckless, lying, dangerous, crazy.”¹³⁶⁸ Albeit in very different terms, he had already declared his intentions to Van den Steen, who had urged him

¹³⁶⁵ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 21 and 26 November and 4 December 1917.

¹³⁶⁶ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 628.

¹³⁶⁷ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 426, Pierre Orts to Paul Hymans, 17 October 1917.

¹³⁶⁸ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 18 October 1917.

to stay and be a good patriot.¹³⁶⁹ To no avail, however. According to Bassompierre, even Broqueville's efforts to make things right by expressing contrition, promising "not to do it any more" and saying that "he would conform to Pierre O[rts]'s advice always" could not mollify the Secretary-General.¹³⁷⁰

Orts's uncompromising attitude towards Broqueville initially threatened to work against him. After conversations with the Cabinet Chief, even Renkin accused him of being, in the words of Bassompierre, "too 'entire'." In early November 1917, Van den Steen warned Orts that his attitude would lead people to think that he wished to topple Broqueville in order to take his place. The Cabinet Chief adroitly made use of these rumours and apparently even managed to convince Bassompierre to plead with Orts for another chance. In doing so, the Political Director told his friend about "the rumour I heard that people say he is ambitious." This information clearly shook Orts. Ambition was indeed the very quality that diplomats generally ascribed to politicians, implying that it represented everything that they were not. Orts took his time to expound his views to Bassompierre, who took note of them in his diaries as follows: "Broq[ueville] is a danger & will remain so because he has it in his blood to resort to tricks. He, Pierre Orts, has no ambition. He is timid. Detests the stage. His love of bien public would make him accept even a post of minister if they thought he would fill it well. On condition he was supported by a party, by friendly colleagues, or by the crown, none of these supports existed for him. Therefore he has definitely declared he would never be a minister though some had again thought of him, who had already thought in the same way 3 months ago."¹³⁷¹

Orts's reasoning adds some more depth to Neumann's theories of diplomatic scripts. According to Neumann, diplomats "overfulfilled" the heroic script when their career ambitions were so apparent that people told stories about them.¹³⁷² Apparently, an effective reaction would be to transform these stories and have them fit in the script of the self-effacing mediator, who did not wish to hold the spotlight but rather wanted to mediate for the common good as a representative rather than as an independent actor. At any rate, Orts's arguments sufficed to convince Bassompierre, who reviewed his opinion.¹³⁷³ Also Renkin's sympathy for Broqueville was short-lived. Together with Hymans, he intensified the opposition against

¹³⁶⁹ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 23 October 1917.

¹³⁷⁰ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 8 November 1917.

¹³⁷¹ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 19 October and 9 and 10 November 1917.

¹³⁷² NEUMANN, *At Home with the Diplomats*, 99-101.

¹³⁷³ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 21 November 1917.

the Cabinet Chief from inside the government, gratefully exploiting a report sent by Gaiffier but which Broqueville had kept from his colleagues until mid-November 1917. In this document, the diplomat disclosed all the details of the secret negotiations and emphasized how Cambon continued to denounce the Cabinet Chief's diplomatic incompetence. Renkin also informed his – to use Haag's terminology – “vassal” Edmond Patris, who immediately launched a campaign against Broqueville in *La Métropole*. Hymans's efforts resulted in an ultimatum which was sent to the King at the end of November 1917 and which stated that the Liberal and Socialist Ministers would leave the government if Broqueville did not offer his resignation as Foreign Minister. As the main reason, they invoked the French Foreign Ministry's loss of confidence in the Cabinet Chief.¹³⁷⁴

Around the same time, Gaiffier decided to inform the King via Van den Steen that Cambon had asked him when the crisis which would remove Broqueville would finally erupt. The French Secretary-General suggested to have it erupt as soon as possible because “before us Frenchmen he will not have the necessary authority to speak in the name of Belgium.”¹³⁷⁵ According to Haag, this letter sealed Broqueville's fate.¹³⁷⁶ Given that Broqueville had by then already informed Orts that he would resign as Foreign Minister and that the King had already asked Van den Heuvel if he would accept these functions, this seems unlikely.¹³⁷⁷

Another, more interesting aspect of Gaiffier's letter puzzles Haag. By the time its contents became known in royal and government circles all major players had their favourites and worst choices for the succession of Broqueville: the King (and Broqueville) opted successively for Van den Heuvel, the Flemish Minister of Arts and Sciences Prosper Poulet, and the Catholic Minister of State Gérard Cooreman but very much disliked the *jusqu'au boutists* Hymans and Orts; Renkin preferred Cooreman as well but would also have liked to see the Foreign Ministership go to Carton de Wiart or Hymans; the Liberal leader claimed the posting for a Liberal, meaning himself or Orts.¹³⁷⁸ In his letter to Van den Steen, Gaiffier wrote that Cambon asked him the permission “to speak with a brutal frankness”, after which he declared that “in the house [the French Foreign Ministry] we would even prefer the

¹³⁷⁴ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 629-632 and 634. See also SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 143-145; and THIELEMANS, “Les Carnets de guerre”, 329-330.

¹³⁷⁵ 1914-1918, n° 586, Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 23 November 1917; Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Albert de Belgique, 25 November 1917.

¹³⁷⁶ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 635.

¹³⁷⁷ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 23 November 1917; SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 145. The King had actually already realized that Broqueville could not stay on as Foreign Minister on 15 November 1917, see THIELEMANS, “Les Carnets de guerre”, 327 and 432-433.

¹³⁷⁸ See SCHEPENS, *Koning Albert*, 146-153.

continuance of Broqueville over the nomination of Carton.”¹³⁷⁹ While Schepens mistakenly identifies Carton as Henry de Carton de Wiart’s neutralist brother Edmond and attributes Cambon’s intervention to the French aversion of Belgian neutrality, Haag knew well enough that Carton was Henry, who had always assumed an attentive and complaisant attitude towards France. As such, Haag admits, this part of Gaiffier’s letter “plunges us into confusion.”¹³⁸⁰ Most likely, the explanation lies in the adversity which existed between Carton and Gaiffier ever since they had both been in the running to obtain the posting of Belgian minister in Paris. Carton’s frustration that the job eventually went to Gaiffier might have led the diplomat to fear the presence of his rival at the head of the Foreign Ministry. Since Gaiffier would certainly not have dared, in a letter to the King, to attribute to Cambon words that the French Secretary-General had not spoken, Cambon’s intervention probably resulted from his sentiments of solidarity with a fellow diplomat whose career risked to end on a bad note due to the machinations of an ambitious politician.

In any case, Gaiffier should not have feared: Hymans eventually carried the day and became the new Foreign Minister. The appointment of a *jusqu’au boutist* and an – although still fairly recent – annexationist despite the King’s disapproval clearly illustrates that, after the removal of Beyens, the departure of Broqueville constituted the second major shift of the power over Belgian diplomacy away from the monarchy and towards the government. However, after an audience granted to Hymans on 17 December 1917, Albert reassured himself that the new Foreign Minister would not act as the Francophile, anti-neutral expansionist he feared him to be. Hymans even promised to keep the King informed of Belgian foreign policy decisions, acknowledged that the moment was not opportune for making declarations about the country’s future international status and agreed to plead with the Allies to make an end to the war when its continuance threatened to lead to a European social revolution.¹³⁸¹ Yet one wonders how long Hymans would continue to humour the King? Or how long could or would he resist the urges coming from his annexationist collaborators at the Foreign Ministry to send a strong signal that the Belgian government would henceforth conduct a pro-Allied policy?

Establishing the prominent part played by diplomats such as Orts and Gaiffier in the process of unhorsing Broqueville, this section has largely ignored the rhetoric the Cabinet Chief’s political opponents used to discredit his involvement in the Coppée-Von der Lancken

¹³⁷⁹ 1914-1918, n° 586, Edmond de Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 23 November 1917.

¹³⁸⁰ HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 634.

¹³⁸¹ THIELEMANS, “Les Carnets de guerre”, 333; PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 242-243; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 335.

peace feelers. Without really going into the matter, it is worthwhile mentioning that their discourses provide interesting clues about how the ideas associated with the New Diplomacy had entered the minds of Belgian policy-makers. In a letter to the King, Hymans labelled Broqueville's secret negotiations as "occult dealings", thus referring to the light-darkness imagery associated with open versus secret diplomacy.¹³⁸² During speeches held before audiences of Belgian refugees in France, the ardent annexationist Minister of Railways Paul Segers, who had been side-tracked by Broqueville in the Summer of 1917, proclaimed his adherence to a pro-Allied and anti-neutralist policy in more distinct 'New Diplomatic' terms. Between the Allies and Belgium has been established, he declared, "an indestructible union which will blunt all the efforts of occult diplomacy and defeatism." Making a more explicit reference to Broqueville's involvement with Von der Lancken, Segers objected that "Belgium [...] will not lend its ear to any peace proposition without the full consent of those who form with it the same front for the same victory." He then implicitly – and perhaps even unconsciously – rejected the aims of New Diplomacy by stating that Lenin's Russia "has to contend with convulsions full of danger" because it was "drunk with too much liberty, blinded with too much light." In his conclusion, however, Segers brought his pro-Allied stance and his adhesion to the methods of New Diplomacy back together by arguing that "confidence without reticence has to prevail over the hesitations of the past, has to permit to cleanse all the Augean stables, has to wipe out the occult attempts and the intrigues of a shady diplomacy."¹³⁸³ Just like the journalists of *Le XXe siècle* had re-interpreted pre-war criticisms on the incompetence of Belgian diplomats in a way that suited their annexationist propaganda, their kindred spirits in the government had prepared the ground for a similar recycling of pre-war criticisms of the system of diplomatic practice.

Or so it seemed. One could indeed wonder whether Segers would have advocated the same publicity in diplomacy had he, as a member of the government, been involved in secret negotiations to expand Belgium's territory. With regards to the event which ended Broqueville's Foreign Ministership, members of the government could effectively use the rhetoric of New Diplomacy because they were condemning a practice that arguably predated the so-called Old Diplomacy. Whereas the methods of this traditional kind of diplomacy in the nineteenth century involved negotiations known to the Foreign Ministry and the government but without the knowledge of parliament and the press, throughout 1917 Broqueville and Albert had in a way recurred to an even older form of foreign-policy making

¹³⁸² 1914-1918, n° 71, Paul Hymans to Albert de Belgique, 22 November 1917.

¹³⁸³ Paul Segers quoted in HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 632.

in which the favourite through a network of informal agents conducted secret negotiations on behalf and with the sole knowledge of the prince as the sovereign of the realm. With the departure of Broqueville from the Foreign Ministry, this kind of diplomacy was definitely relegated to the realm of the past.

By the time Charles de Broqueville was rowed out of the Belgian harbour on Diplomatic Island and back to the ship which he had guided there a few years earlier, life in the Belgian resort looked very differently. From aboard the ship that for the time being he was still allowed to captain, Broqueville could overview the consequences of the actions he had stimulated. He could see how many of the older inhabitants had been removed from the island or chased out of the House. He had experienced that not all of these men had allowed this to happen without putting up a struggle. Senior islanders such as Baron Paul de Groote nevertheless had to accept that the rules guiding the life of the Belgian inhabitants of Diplomatic Island had fundamentally altered and that the barriers protecting them against the privateering politicians and journalists had been demolished. It struck them as particularly painful that the junior inhabitants of the House had stimulated this process, while the Belgian resort's ruler could or would no longer keep them safe.

Mooring his ship in the Belgian harbour on Diplomatic Island, Captain Broqueville had quickly become convinced that he knew how the power was divided there. After winning the battle for the control of the Belgian resort, he tried to consolidate his authority by simultaneously concluding alliances with on the one hand the junior inhabitants and on the other hand the Ruler, whose moral prestige he believed he needed in order to effectively manage the resort and to reap the fruits from its soil once the storm had subsided. However, the same storm had greatly affected the norms and values which determined relations between not only the Belgian resort's inhabitants but also between the different resorts of Diplomatic Island. This certainly influenced the usability of the alliances that Broqueville had struck and the effectiveness of the methods he had used to honour them. It particularly contributed to revealing the incompatibility between the captain's two alliances. Moreover, Broqueville had staked too much on his connection with the Belgian resort's ruler and too little on that with the junior inhabitants. At the same time, he had neglected the men who had sailed with him to the island to the extent that he failed to see that another alliance had long been struck between them and the House's junior inhabitants.

There was some irony in the fact that these men succeeded to remove Broqueville and had successfully worked towards bestowing the authority over the Belgian resort to a

rebellious sailor whom the captain had initially sent as a representative to one of the island's other resorts. Henceforth the politician Paul Hymans, the diplomat Pierre Orts and the bureaucrat Albert de Bassompierre would govern the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island.

CHAPTER 10. THE LIBERAL MONARCHY I: THE REINS OF BELGIAN FOREIGN POLICY

One of the first letters Hymans found when he entered his new office at the Foreign Ministry came from Orts. The resignation of the Secretary-General had not been accepted and Orts thus became Hymans's principal collaborator. In the letter, he vented his frustrations about the past but also expressed his hopes for the future. Deliberately ignoring the previous five months as if they had never occurred, Orts evaluated the first three years of the war. Beyens and Van der Elst leaving the Foreign Ministry, Orts argued, meant "the end of those who put [the national] conscience asleep." He stressed that the years since August 1914 were "precious years when great occasions arose" because of "the sudden burst of patriotic fervour." He explained that "the rapprochement of all the social milieus" could have allowed the nation "to rally round a political doctrine which renewed the glorious beginnings of our nationality, the government and public opinion having been equally indifferent until then to international problems." These words reflected his belief that the war had created unique opportunities to materialize the Greater Belgium ideology, which required the transcendence of party-political differences, the prevalence of a united foreign policy over domestic disputes, and a positive revaluation of the ideas of Belgium's founding fathers. Beyens and Van der Elst had wasted these opportunities allegedly "because of their incomprehension of the great national problem." However, Orts suggested, their faults might still be redressed if "our new chief, and also my friend" would never forget the succession of events which had led to his taking the helm. According to Orts, Hymans should particularly reflect upon the lessons contained in the oeuvre of Banning. This would stimulate his awareness – and Orts quoted Banning – "that the destiny of Belgium is intimately connected with the possession and free disposition of the two rivers that run through it." Orts declared to Hymans that he who would pursue a policy aimed at fulfilling these goals "will have deserved well of the country because ... he will have contributed to strengthen the national idea and cohesion."¹³⁸⁴

The 'nationalist' foreign policy that Orts asked Hymans to conduct clearly had to lead to the country's territorial expansion. In the opinion of Orts and his like-minded friends, the war had indeed provided the nation with a second project to overcome its internal divisions of class and religion. However, in comparison with the first, colonial project, Belgian nationalists discerned greater possibilities, the nation being much more profoundly affected by the war. Overly enthused about the rise to power of a fellow annexationist, Orts even

¹³⁸⁴ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 426, Pierre Orts to Paul Hymans, s.d. [late December 1918].

deemed the time ripe “to make Metz a Belgian question.” It took Bassompierre some effort to convince him that annexing the capital of Lorraine was not very realistic.¹³⁸⁵

At any rate, Hymans’s closest collaborator had great expectations of the new Foreign Minister. Now that Orts and Bassompierre had successfully ‘purged’ the diplomatic establishment of the most important anti-annexationists, they believed they could count on a representative of the government who shared their foreign policy views. Nevertheless, the diplomatic establishment and the government still had to reckon with a third player who had always held great authority over the country’s foreign policy, namely the King. Albert’s ideas about Belgium’s role on the European scene often contradicted with the policy associated with the majority of the government represented by Hymans and with the Foreign Ministry’s leading officials. Of course, changes in the composition of the government and personnel changes inside the Foreign Ministry had diminished his influence. This chapter provides an – admittedly somewhat impressionistic – overview of how and by whom Belgian foreign policy was made during the more than two and a half years that Hymans led the Foreign Ministry. More specifically, it will illustrate how the tension between the pro-Allied, *jusqu’au bout* policy on the one hand and the neutralist policy directed towards ending Belgium’s involvement in the war as soon as possible on the other hand, evolved until the 11 November armistice and shaped the way that the Foreign Ministry’s leadership, members of the government and the King worked towards the Versailles peace conference. It also tries to find out how they perceived the proceedings and results of this conference and its reverberations in Belgian society.

§ 1. Humouring the King?

As Michael Palo has suggested, Hymans was a flexible politician who certainly had pro-Allied sympathies but also wanted to collaborate with the more neutralist members of the government and to meet the King at least part of the way. This stance found its expression in the Belgian government’s reply to the August 1917 papal peace proposal, which was only communicated after Hymans had taken over the Foreign Ministry. While Orts and Bassompierre had insisted that the Belgian reply should contain a specific repudiation of neutrality, Hymans decided to leave this controversial point out of the final text.¹³⁸⁶ The reply

¹³⁸⁵ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 31 December 1917 and 1 January 1918.

¹³⁸⁶ PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 242-243 and 275.

did, however, implicitly state Belgium's loyalty to the Allies. Albert, so Jan Velaers argues, could live with this compromise but continued to try to find ways to stress the independence of Belgian foreign policy.¹³⁸⁷

The occasion to do so arose when the German Chancellor, in a reaction to Wilson's Fourteen Points speech, declared that the German government had never wanted to annex Belgium but only desired that the country would not serve as an operating base for hostile military actions against his country. The Chancellor invited the Belgian government to respond. Although Hymans and his colleagues agreed to merely repeat the message that they had sent to the Pope, the King managed to have the Foreign Minister inform Belgian diplomats that they were also allowed to listen to the concessions that the German government was willing to make. Velaers argues that most likely it was not a coincidence that in these days the King's brother-in-law Count Hans von Törring-Jettenbach contacted Fernand Peltzer.¹³⁸⁸ The Belgian minister in Bern immediately wired to Bassompierre, who informed Hymans. The Foreign Minister and the Political Director agreed to forward Peltzer's telegram to the King. They accompanied it with the suggestion to allow the meeting on the double condition that the Belgian government would immediately inform the Allies and that Peltzer would do no more than listen to Törring. Moreover, Hymans did not await the King's consent to send this suggestion as instructions to Peltzer.¹³⁸⁹

The King was very dissatisfied with this course of events. In times when the German army seemed on the verge of breaking through the Belgian lines, Albert argued, it was madness to assume such a provocative and arrogant attitude. "The soldier will pay for this attitude," the King declared, adding that "it is always on him and on the people that the faults of the leaders come down."¹³⁹⁰ Velaers uncritically accepts Broqueville's contention that the King's speech deeply impacted on his ministers. "Your Majesty has, especially in international matters, views that remind me of [...] the great statesman Leopold I," the Cabinet Chief asserted in a letter to Albert. By contrast, he continued, "our little men of the hour are unable to relate to this superior policy which transcends the passions and discerns the true interest of the country." Velaers could have also quoted another passage in the same letter, which stated that "this is not the opinion of a courtier, yet the sentiment of a frank and loyal servant." Since Broqueville was by then on the verge of losing the support of even his

¹³⁸⁷ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 335-336.

¹³⁸⁸ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 337-339. On these conversations, see also WILLEQUET, Jacques, "Sondages de paix en 1918. Le dernière mission du Comte Törring", in *Mélanges*, 661-675.

¹³⁸⁹ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 31 December 1917 and 1 January 1918.

¹³⁹⁰ Albert cited in VELAERS, *Albert I*, 340. See also THIELEMANS, "Albert entre guerre et paix", 146.

most trusted colleagues in the government and clung more than ever to his special relation with the King, these words should definitely not be taken at face value.¹³⁹¹

Hymans, for one, was not inclined to just accept the royal viewpoint in foreign policy issues. When Peltzer informed the Foreign Ministry that he had told Törring that the Belgian government would not take any diplomatic steps without consulting with the Allies first, the Bavarian nobleman had replied that imminent German military successes would certainly lead to the withdrawal of any concessions towards Belgium. Hymans transferred this message to the King, stating that he wished to issue a categorical refusal to pursue the talks any further. Albert went at great lengths to persuade the Foreign Minister to keep communication lines open. During an audience granted to Hymans on 1 April 1918, the King managed to convince him to at least ask Törring for further clarifications. However, a new conversation five days later led Albert to suspect that the Foreign Minister tried to return to his previous point of view. The next day, he therefore sent a long note to Hymans repeating that “the reply to count Törring may not close the door to any exchange of views.” On 12 April, however, Hymans informed the King that he was no longer in favour of responding to Törring.¹³⁹² According to Velaers, this was due to the Foreign Minister’s “consultation with London and Paris.”¹³⁹³

However, Velaers does not provide any references to support this statement. Like most other historians describing the event, he does not take into account the effect – nor even the mere existence – of the pressure from inside the Belgian Foreign Ministry on Hymans’s attitude. Reading Bassompierre’s diaries, it seems that the Political Director and Orts constantly tried and repeatedly succeeded to convince Hymans not to accept the King’s point of view. According to Bassompierre, on 4 April Orts had even convinced Albert’s *chef de cabinet* that Törring’s message to Peltzer actually contained the “German wish to impose neutrality, disarmament and economic vassality [vassalage]” on Belgium. Van den Steen was “dumbfounded & converted”, Bassompierre noted. Nevertheless, Orts agreed that it would be unwise to steer towards a confrontation with the King and drafted an answer to Törring that would meet the King halfway. The Secretary-General went up to De Panne to personally

¹³⁹¹ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 340; 1914-1918, n° 35, Charles de Broqueville to Albert de Belgique, 20 March 1917. Broqueville would succumb in May 1918 under the continuous from Renkin and especially Hymans, who even managed to discredit Broqueville in the eyes of the King. See DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 146-150; THIELEMANS, “Albert entre guerre et paix”, 152-156; HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 650-665; PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 243-244 and 277-280. For an account of how the departure of Broqueville from the Cabinet was received inside the Foreign Ministry, see SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 8, 15, 23-26 May and 1 June 1918.

¹³⁹² PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 243 and 276-277; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 343-344; THIELEMANS, “Albert entre guerre et paix”, 146-147.

¹³⁹³ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 344.

defend his draft. It stated that further German clarifications, which would immediately be forwarded to the Allies, could lead to a Belgian response “if by doing so [Belgium] does not compromise its national future.” Possibly due to their ambivalent character, the words of Orts suited both the nationalists and the King who, according to Bassompierre, “accepted the text easily.”¹³⁹⁴

Conversations only continued at the end of June 1918, after Törring had contacted Peltzer again. The Bavarian count now had to admit that he had no actual mandate and foremost wished to inquire what consequences a satisfactory declaration with regards to Belgium would have on the Allied war effort. He also wished to know whether possible German-Belgian peace feelers would be reported to Paris and London on a day-to-day basis or rather only afterwards. Törring concluded with a stick and carrot approach that included warning Peltzer for an imminent German military offensive and at the same time offering King Albert a mediating function in future negotiations between the Allied and Central Powers.¹³⁹⁵ Upon hearing about the conversations, Bassompierre immediately went to Orts and told him that “it’s a trap” and that “we must back out.” In case the government would not heed his call, he added, the Allies should be informed at once, before another conversation took place.¹³⁹⁶ Yet Bassompierre should not have worried too much, for Hymans had no problems convincing the King to postpone the next encounter between Peltzer and Törring. Although Albert hesitated a few more times over the following months, by mid-September Orts and his chief had completely persuaded him to officially reject the Törring peace feeler.¹³⁹⁷

By then, it was abundantly clear that the Allies would win the war. As Velaers argues, the King’s “sharp intellect” incited him to ignore the counsel of his closest military adviser and to finally accept to put the Belgian army under the supreme command of Allied marshals.¹³⁹⁸ Most officials at the Foreign Ministry probably held different views about Albert’s intelligence but obviously greeted the royal initiative with enthusiasm. In their view, it indeed cleared the road for the official repudiation of the country’s obligatory neutrality. While he did not actually want to go that far, Albert nevertheless decided to give his consent.

¹³⁹⁴ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 29 March, 1, 4, 8-10, 13, 18, 20, 22, and 27 April 1918.

¹³⁹⁵ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 362-363.

¹³⁹⁶ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 11 July 1918.

¹³⁹⁷ PALO, “The Question of Neutrality”, 245-248 and 280-282; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 366-369; THIELEMANS, “Albert entre guerre et paix”, 148-151; WILLEQUET, “Sondages”, 670-675.. See also SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 13-15, 26, and 30 July, 7-8 and 27-31 August and 7-8, 14, 20, and 23-26 September 1918.

¹³⁹⁸ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 369-377. See also COOLSAET, *België*, 220-221.

Immediately upon the King's acceptance, Bassompierre and his colleagues took to spreading the message to the Allies and to the Belgian press. By the time the Armistice was signed, the French and British governments acknowledged the Belgian decision.¹³⁹⁹

An evaluation of the interactions between Orts and Bassompierre, Hymans, and the King in the first nine months of Hymans's ministership reveals that the royal authority over Belgian foreign policy-making had further waned. Albert had realized that he had to come to terms with a politician who, unlike Beyens, was not foremost concerned with rendering the royal foreign policy acceptable to the Belgian and Allied governments, and who, unlike Broqueville, refused to undertake peace negotiations without the knowledge of these parties. Moreover, Hymans held opposite policy views and was only prepared to go a comparatively rather short way to meet the King. In the process, he was constantly advised and worked on by the men his predecessor had promoted to leading functions in the Foreign Ministry. The Allied victory in November 1918 no doubt strengthened these men in their belief that they were right all along.

§ 2. The Road to Versailles and Back

In his memoirs, Orts devoted only a few lines to the closing ceremony of the Paris peace conference, which took place at the Palace of Versailles between mid-January and the end of June of 1919. According to him, it transpired "in the same disorder which from one end to the other had characterized the conference." Entering the *Galerie des Glaces*, he noticed that the hall was "packed with guests, the majority of which would have had many difficulties justifying the favour bestowed upon them to witness this historic event." Orts saw how "in the front rank, making a lot of noise, the actresses of all the Parisian theatres were showing of their spring dresses" and how "everywhere you could hear the clicking sound of camera's."¹⁴⁰⁰

Orts clearly disliked the aura of publicity which in his memory surrounded the event. This aura was partly created by the presence of the American president Woodrow Wilson. At the start of the conference his famous Fourteen Points, the first of which stated that "diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view", were expected to serve as

¹³⁹⁹ MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 65-66; PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 250 and 282-283. See also 1914-1918, n° 259, Pierre Orts to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 12 September 1918; AMBZ, n° 15911, "Services extérieurs 1858-1919", Léon van der Essen to Roger de Borchgrave, 18 September 1918; and Paul Hymans to Ludovic Moncheur, 26 September 1918.

¹⁴⁰⁰ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 165.

guidelines for the conduct of diplomacy in Versailles. Yet Orts must have witnessed that despite the expectations created by Wilson's ideas, publicity and openness had not exactly characterized the conference's proceedings. Instead, the so-called Big Three, which in addition to Wilson included the British and French Prime Ministers David Lloyd George and George Clemenceau took most major decisions at informal gatherings behind closed doors, often in the company of 'number four', the Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando. These decisions were generally ratified afterwards by the delegates of smaller states, among which ranked Belgium.¹⁴⁰¹ These practices indeed reminded of 'old', Great Power diplomacy. As such, what remained of the ideal of publicity was no more than, at least in the memory of Orts, actresses and photographers lounging about at the Versailles Palace grounds.

Of course, Orts's negative recollections of the peace conference could also have had other, underlying reasons. There seems to exist a consensus in historiography that in Versailles traditional diplomats, which includes in this vision not only members of the diplomatic corps but also Foreign Ministry officials, were put at the side-lines.¹⁴⁰² The conference's protagonists Lloyd George and Wilson in particular preferred to apply other channels of communication. The British Prime Minister even stated that "diplomats were invented simply to waste time" and were "not authorized to speak for their countries."¹⁴⁰³ According to Michaël Riemens, Lloyd George's opinion sprung from his conviction that professional diplomats lacked democratic legitimacy. His election by the British people had strengthened him to conduct his country's foreign policy with little regard for the Foreign Office and its employees, appealing to the services of personal confidants and specialists instead. Riemens argues that Wilson did more or less the same, using his friend Colonel House as an informal negotiator. During the war, House had even transformed his Manhattan apartment into an alternative Foreign Ministry, where he discussed the future peace with foreign diplomats. House also created a think tank composed of the United States' top academics, twenty-three of which accompanied Wilson on his ship to Europe after the war.

¹⁴⁰¹ A highly readable narrative about the events in Versailles is MACMILLAN, Margaret, *Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War*, London, 2003. See also BOEMEKE, Manfred Franz, Gerald D. FELDMAN, and Elisabeth GLASER (eds.), *The Treaty of Versailles: a reassessment after 75 years*, Cambridge, 1998; and from an IR Theoretical, realist perspective GRAEBNER, Norman A. and Edward M. BENNETT, *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy: The Failure of the Wilsonian Vision*, Cambridge, 2011, Chapter 3.

¹⁴⁰² See the literature cited in the introduction. See also RIEMENS, *De passie voor vrede*, 155-162.

¹⁴⁰³ David Lloyd George quoted in CRAIG, Gordon A., "The British Foreign Office from Grey to Austen Chamberlain", in CRAIG and GILBERT, *The Diplomats*, 28. See also OTTE, Thomas G., "Between Old Diplomacy and New: Eyre Crowe and British Foreign Policy, 1914-1925", in Gaynor JOHNSON (ed.), *Peacemaking, Peacemakers and Diplomacy, 1880-1939: Essays in Honour of Professor Alan Sharp*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010, 30-31.

Much more than the American Foreign Office, these men advised the President on all matters relating to the peace conference. Riemens put Clemenceau in more or less the same category as Lloyd George and Wilson and concludes that “in Paris 1919 a new style of diplomatic representation and legitimacy represented itself in the person of the ‘democratic-populist leader’, the professional politician ... who at important moments personally took foreign policy in his own hands and, in the full light of publicity and with a side-glance to the elections, presented himself explicitly as the representative of the electorate.”¹⁴⁰⁴

Orts was, in several ways, a traditional diplomat. Could he have felt to have been put at the side-lines in the build-up to the peace conference and during its proceedings? Immediately after the war, the King had committed the so-called ‘Coup of Loppem’, named after the castle where he resided in the last weeks of the war. Albert had indeed convinced Cabinet Chief Gérard Cooreman, who had succeeded to Broqueville in May 1918, to hand in the resignation of the government in exile. The King then formed a new government of national union primarily composed of politicians and prominent personalities who had played active parts in the National Committee for Help and Food, which during the war had grown out to become a kind of surrogate government in occupied Belgium. Fearing a social revolution, Albert had selected men who would accept the introduction of equal manhood suffrage. To make the right wing of the Catholic Party accept these measures, he had hauled Broqueville back in as Interior Minister. The backbone of the new government was formed by the moderate Catholics Léon Delacroix, who became the first Belgian government leader to bear the title of Prime Minister, and Henri Jaspar, who was named Minister of Economic Affairs. Other newcomers were the Socialists Edouard Anseele and Joseph Wauters, the Liberals Louis Franck and Fulgence Masson, and the Catholics Joseph Harmignie and Albéric Ruzette. Since Orts did not have close relations with any of these politicians, his position could well have been under threat.¹⁴⁰⁵

Yet it was not. The King had indeed deemed best to incorporate three members of the government in exile into the new government. In addition to Vandervelde, these were two of Orts’s closest political friends, namely Hymans, who moreover remained Foreign Minister, and Renkin, who was transferred to the Ministry of Railways. As such, the loudest voices in favour of Belgian territorial expansion still resounded in meetings of the Cabinet. Furthermore, it could be argued that the authority of Hymans in foreign policy issues only

¹⁴⁰⁴ RIEMENS, *De passie voor vrede*, 111-120.

¹⁴⁰⁵ For the most elaborate account of the events at Loppem and their immediate consequences, see VELAERS, *Albert I*, 436-485. See also HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 668-673.

increased, given that Broqueville had compromised himself precisely in this sphere and that, with the exception of Vandervelde and Renkin, the other ministers had never been involved in determining the position of Belgium on the international scene. As Orts remembered, Delacroix did not really have an opinion about how to assure Belgium's future security. "Whether I spoke to him about the territory's defence, the Scheldt regime in times of war and peace, [...], the Scheldt-Meuse-Rhine canal, the Luxembourg question, M. Delacroix's eyes nearly popped out of his head." According to Orts, the Prime Minister went "from discovery into discovery."¹⁴⁰⁶ These words suggest that the Secretary-General did not have much difficulties convincing Delacroix of his expertise and of the validity of his ideas. Although as Prime Minister, Delacroix could certainly not remain ignorant of foreign policy issues and would inevitably develop his own views along the way, perhaps the reasons for Orts's negative sentiments should be sought elsewhere.

Most obviously, these would indeed be found in his dissatisfaction with the outcomes and the aftermath of the peace conference. If Wilson's new 'democratic' diplomatic ideology would have determined these outcomes, the peoples of Europe would have been allowed to determine their own sovereignty and international political status. As a nationalist, Orts would probably have preferred the term 'nation' to 'people' but he certainly had a good idea of who the Belgian people were and on what lands they would choose to live if they had the chance to self-determine their fate. Perhaps the men leading the Paris peace conference held other ideas.

Preparing for the Greater Belgium

In the wake of the armistice, Orts and Bassompierre were quite optimistic. The Allies had indeed accepted that Belgium would no longer be obligatorily neutral and this stimulated them in their efforts to obtain a positive outcome for the intimately connected matter of Belgium's territorial expansion. Reading Bassompierre's diary entries for the weeks that preceded the peace conference leads one to suspect that the Political Director and the Secretary-General were completely preoccupied with preparing the ground for the annexation of Luxembourg, Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders. This, however, was only one of three spearheads which, the Belgian government had decided, would guide Belgian activity in Versailles. Admittedly, Orts and Bassompierre also devoted some attention to the second spearhead, namely the replacement of obligatory neutrality with a satisfactory system of national security, preferably through an Allied treaty of guarantee. Soon, however, it would

¹⁴⁰⁶ ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 141-142.

become clear that the system of collective security in the framework of the League of Nations would provide an excellent excuse for notably the British government to turn down Belgian requests in this regard. More importantly, Orts and Bassompierre largely ignored the third spearhead of Belgian policy which for much larger sections of the Belgian population predominated, namely the issue of the reparations that the German government would have to pay.¹⁴⁰⁷

Already in February 1918, Bassompierre was lobbying in Paris with the help of Orts and Nothomb to have the Luxembourgish dynasty removed after the war. Grand Duchess Marie-Adélaïde had widely compromised herself because of her outspoken pro-German sympathies, and her removal would indeed help to pave the way for a personal union between Belgium and Luxembourg. Probably because King Albert sent Count van den Steen to make clear to the French authorities that he opposed the idea, Bassompierre and his friends for the time being did not seem to have further pursued the initiative.¹⁴⁰⁸ However, the death of Van den Steen in September 1918 led the annexationists to renew their attention for the Luxembourg issue. The King's *chef de cabinet* had been Belgium's minister plenipotentiary accredited with Marie-Adélaïde until the German army occupied the country in late 1914. Since accrediting his successor with the Grand Duchess would mean that the Belgian government still recognized her, Orts and Bassompierre advised Hymans to send a *chargé d'affaires* accredited to the Luxembourgish government instead.¹⁴⁰⁹ While Nothomb and Carton de Wiart suggested to appoint the publicist Fernand Ryckman de Betz who ranked among Le Havre's most ardent annexationists, Hymans decided not to opt for someone outside of the diplomatic career. This was probably due to the influence of his Secretary-General, who only weeks before had claimed that Belgian industrialists and other leading personalities finally started to appreciate the qualities of Belgian diplomats.¹⁴¹⁰ The Foreign Minister eventually chose Prince Albert de Ligne, then advisor at the Belgian legation in The Hague. According to Maria De Waele, this choice had the advantage that Ligne "was not part of the annexationist clan in Le Havre so that his appointment would not be met with too much suspicion."¹⁴¹¹ Although De Waele is basically right, her contention deserves some further clarification.

¹⁴⁰⁷ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 717-722; MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 69, 271, and 294-296.

¹⁴⁰⁸ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 14 and 18-23 February 1918; MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 207-208.

¹⁴⁰⁹ 1914-1918, n° 225, Paul Hymans to Albert de Belgique, 22 October 1918.

¹⁴¹⁰ 1914-1918, n° 105, Pierre Orts to Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, 26 September 1918.

¹⁴¹¹ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 505.

Most likely, Ligne was a candidate who had the approval of both the leading Foreign Ministry officials and the King. On the one hand, while Ligne was not very closely involved in the Foreign Ministry's annexationist machinations, he certainly favoured working towards the country's territorial expansion. As we have seen, the prince was indeed a full member of the Congo generation and had internalized the colonial mind. This will no doubt have increased his susceptibility for Belgian annexationism. Moreover, at least as early as March 1917 conversations with Ligne convinced Bassompierre that they indeed held similar ideas about the country's territorial war aims.¹⁴¹² On the other hand, we have also seen that Ligne had always been very close with the dynasty and that the King took a personal interest in the diplomat's career. In May 1918 Ligne had written directly to the King to ask for his removal from The Hague, invoking as the main motive that he could no longer support the attitude towards him from the head of the legation, Baron Albéric Fallon, who allegedly treated him "now as a schoolboy and then as a porter." Although the prince realized that the King might possibly deem the manoeuvre at least a little unorthodox, especially in times of war when a higher degree of self-abnegation was expected from Belgian diplomats, he seems to have been confident that his intimacy with Albert would overcome the risks attached to his request.¹⁴¹³

At any rate, the King gladly accepted Hymans's proposition to name Ligne in Luxembourg and invited the diplomat for an audience. While the tenor of the conversation which ensued from their encounter remains unclear, it will probably have differed from the enthusiasm with which Nothomb, whom Hymans had promoted inside the Foreign Ministry, informed Ligne about his duties in Luxembourg and handed him the sizeable amount of 100.000 Belgian francs for propaganda purposes. This money came from the Foreign Ministry's budget but in order to avoid the direct involvement of the Department in propaganda activities, it was transferred to the *Comité de Politique Nationale*, an organization founded by Nothomb with the explicit aim to "territorially reconstitute Belgium."¹⁴¹⁴

Orts, Bassompierre, and Nothomb gave Ligne a very rosy picture of the pro-Belgian sentiments that allegedly pervaded large sections of the Luxembourgish people and its elites. They also sent several propagandists to assist the diplomat in his tasks. These men were attached to the legation or named correspondents by the Belgian annexationist newspapers *La Nation belge* (which Neuray had founded in March 1918 as *Le XXe siècle*'s successor) and *La Métropole*. Ligne, however, soon realized that the picture of Luxembourgish public opinion

¹⁴¹² SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 7 March 1917.

¹⁴¹³ 1909-1914 and 1919-1934, n° 683, Albert de Ligne to Albert de Belgique, 12 May 1918.

¹⁴¹⁴ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 507 and 1550-1552. The quote is on p. 1550.

which the Foreign Ministry's annexationist trio presented him with, bore no resemblance whatsoever to reality. This was the result of Nothomb deliberately palliating the negative comments and exaggerating the positive discourses of his Luxembourgish network, which moreover consisted exclusively of malcontents who had scores to settle with the Luxembourgish leadership. Aware that the great majority of Luxembourgers actually felt little sympathy for Belgium and certainly did not wish to become victims of what they labelled Belgian 'imperialism', Ligne tried as best as he could to increase the country's popularity by throwing banquets to the country's elites and granting nearly every request he received, from students who wished to study in Belgium to Luxembourgish exiles in England who wanted to return via Belgium. More importantly, Ligne repeatedly urged Orts, Bassompierre and Nothomb to call back the boisterous propagandists and to prevent the publication of "stupidly annexationist articles" in *La Nation belge*. The diplomat also criticized the contents of the annexationist campaign, stressing that economic rather than sentimental or historic arguments stood a far greater chance of winning over Luxembourgish public opinion. Finally, Ligne even had the Liberal Brussels newspaper *L'Étoile belge* publish a denial of Belgian annexationist ambitions towards Luxembourg. To no avail, however. Bassompierre, for one, did recognize that the Foreign Ministry's leadership had held a too bright picture of Luxembourgish feelings for Belgium but refused to change tactics. Nothomb, for another, believed that extra money would do the trick and hoped "to extract a million from the Foreign Ministry." Presumably because of the truly deplorable financial situation in Belgium, he 'only' got an extra 40.000 francs.¹⁴¹⁵

While Ligne favoured more traditional methods of subtle and discrete persuading by creating goodwill and also realized soon enough that an economic union with Luxembourg was the most that could be achieved, Bassompierre and his friends kept believing in the chances of territorial expansion and held on to the methods of publicly arguing that the Luxembourgers were indeed the separated brothers of the Belgians and truly wished to return to their Belgian fatherland. To achieve their aims, the Political Director did not hesitate to pick up his pen himself. In early October 1918, Bassompierre published his booklet *Les traités de 1831 et 1839*, on which he had been working since early 1917. Under the pseudonym 'Trévire et Nervien', a reference to the Celtic tribes who lived on a territory that comprised not only contemporary Belgium but also the lands which the annexationists wished to incorporate, Bassompierre repeated the arguments which he had developed in his private

¹⁴¹⁵ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 507-514. The quotes are on pp. 511 and 512.

conversation with Renkin, Orts, and Nothomb in late December 1915. This time, however, he did not support his claim about the uselessness of Zeeland Flanders to the Netherlands by any organic imagery.¹⁴¹⁶ For Bassompierre, working towards the annexation of Luxembourg, Zeeland Flanders and Dutch Limburg was a matter of democratic diplomatic representation, in the sense that he believed that he was executing the Belgian popular will. About a week before the Versailles peace conference started, his perception of several obstacles on the road towards territorial expansion led Bassompierre to wonder: “Will the national sentiment be satisfied with the old frontiers and a perilous situation after all that has passed?” The Political Director believed he knew the answer, stating that “I very much fear that the disappointment will cause Belgians to regret not to be part of a larger State...”¹⁴¹⁷

His understanding of what the Belgians really wanted incited Bassompierre and his like-minded friend Orts to support Belgian annexationist propaganda campaigns in Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders with the same devotion. However, in these territories Belgian propagandists met with even more resistance and found even less support from local malcontents. In Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders anti-annexationist campaigns ran rampant but Orts and Bassompierre tried to depict these as stimulated by pro-German elements and as going against the true sentiments of the local population. Despite the warnings coming from the Belgian legation in The Hague, it would take until mid-March 1919 before Hymans finally accepted that the Belgian propaganda activities did more harm than good. Like Ligne had done from Luxembourg, Fallon had repeatedly urged the Foreign Minister to stop the activities of “naughty” propagandists in Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders. In Maastricht, the only city where until the end of the war a nucleus of pro-Belgian sentiments existed, so Fallon argued in mid-December 1918, their indiscretions had even provoked “manifestations that went as far as to booing and hissing in cinemas at the entry of our Sovereigns in Brussels.” Orts and Bassompierre were so enraged by this news that they considered creating a diplomatic incident about it. At the same time, however, they spurred Fallon to manifest “better sentiments” towards the annexationist propagandists. The diplomat had indeed regularly withheld the letters these men had sent to Nothomb.¹⁴¹⁸ Apart from that, Fallon had given an interview to the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf*, in which he assured that Belgian territorial claims at the expense of the Netherlands were only formulated by persons

¹⁴¹⁶ TRÉVIRE ET NERVIEN [Albert de Bassompierre], *Les traités de 1831 et 1839*, Brussels and Paris, 1918, Chapters 4 and 5 (especially pp. 43 and 55-56). See also SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 4 and 8 August 1918; and DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 412.

¹⁴¹⁷ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 8 January 1919.

¹⁴¹⁸ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 673-713. The quotes are on pp. 694 and 701.

who held no official functions. As he wrote to Hymans, his interview had “a reassuring impression” and contributed to enlightening Dutch personalities who imagined that the Belgian government “nourished the most wicked plans and was even ready to wage war against the Netherlands.”¹⁴¹⁹

Fallon’s attitude would lead to his removal from The Hague and his replacement in March 1919 by the annexationist Christian Democrat Henry Carton de Wiart, who thus received the diplomatic posting he had desired during the war.¹⁴²⁰ Fallon, for his part, had survived attempts by Broqueville to oust him in 1915 and, in the years that followed, many criticisms from Flemish leaders in the Netherlands who condemned his anti-Flemish convictions. Pressure from Orts and Bassompierre on Hymans had eventually sealed his fate. From his diaries, we know that the Political Director had loathed Fallon for quite some time. In April 1916, Bassompierre had realized that Fallon was very much a neutralist. A report in which the diplomat mocked “the annexationist nationalists” for their lack of diplomatic skills, elicited from a vexed Bassompierre the exclamation “Ass!”. The Political Director also claims that a year and a half later, during Broqueville’s Foreign Ministership, he and Orts had summoned Fallon to make clear to him that they did not appreciate his opposition towards a territorial solution of the Scheldt question.¹⁴²¹

Although Fallon shared the opinions of Hymans, Orts and Bassompierre about the Flemish movement in the Netherlands and the danger to Belgian national union that it presumably represented, it remains remarkable that he managed to hold on to his position for such a long time. As we have seen, in the beginning of the war Fallon had survived a motion of distrust from Broqueville thanks to his friendship with Hymans. Did this friendship eventually succumb to the pressure from Orts and Bassompierre? Like Ligne, Fallon disagreed with the methods of achieving Belgian territorial war aims. Both diplomats indeed shared an aversion towards noisy annexationist publicity campaigns, which they tried – somewhat paradoxically but understandably in their choice for the lesser evil – to remedy by appealing to the press themselves. Unlike the prince, however, Fallon disagreed with the essence of Belgian territorial war aims. Perhaps the awareness that nearly all members of the Belgian diplomatic corps preferred discretion over propaganda led Orts and Bassompierre to focus on removing those who did not share their diplomatic goals.

¹⁴¹⁹ AMBZ, PF 114, “Albéric Fallon”, Albéric Fallon to Paul Hymans, 9 December 1919.

¹⁴²⁰ AMBZ, PF 114, “Albéric Fallon”, Paul Hymans to Albéric Fallon, 26 March 1919.

¹⁴²¹ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 17 April 1916 and 22 November 1917.

Nevertheless, the messages from Ligne and Fallon must have made Orts, Bassompierre, and Hymans aware that formulating open claims on Dutch and Luxembourgish lands at the peace conference was particularly risky, especially in times when arguably the two most powerful men in Versailles, namely Wilson and Lloyd George, opposed annexations which disregarded the principle of self-determination of the peoples. Moreover, the Foreign Ministry's leadership had also read in a December 1918 report from Gaiffier that the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau failed to understand the Belgian annexationist view.¹⁴²² "You have written the most beautiful page in history, the role of Belgium was marvellous and you spoil all that by your hunger for aggrandizement", Clemenceau had told Gaiffier, inquiring "do you really need these aggrandizements?" From Moncheur and Cartier, Hymans and his collaborators had already learned that also in London and Washington indifference about the Belgian territorial desires prevailed. In an effort to make the Allies understand the necessity of border changes, Bassompierre and his collaborators drafted a series of notes in which they carefully avoided the term 'annexation' and suggested rather than proclaimed the desirability of territorial alterations. Moreover, they argued, the suggested changes of Belgium's eastern and northern borders were perfectly compatible with the principle of self-determination.¹⁴²³ As the anti-annexationist campaigns in Luxembourg, Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders had revealed, this was not true.

Most historians describing the formulation of the Belgian program in Versailles state that the country's territorial demands were cloaked as suggestions rather than as explicit aims not only because of Wilson's attachment to the self-determination principle but also because of dissension within the government.¹⁴²⁴ This suggests that anti-annexationist members of the government had an actual influence on the formulation of the Belgian program and that it did not reside exclusively in the Foreign Minister and his closest collaborators.

A look at the minutes of the reunions of the Belgian Council of Ministers indicates that the matter was discussed during a single session of a few hours in the morning of 16 December 1918. After the King had given the word to Hymans, the latter gave a long exposé of the program drafted under the supervision of Orts and Bassompierre. The minutes of the Council reunion suggest that Hymans spoke at great lengths about territorial issues and only a very short time about Belgium's financial claims, which were more or less limited to the catchphrase that Belgium was entitled to full reparation of the damages it had suffered.

¹⁴²² On Clemenceau's views about the peace settlement, see WATSON, David R., *Georges Clemenceau: France, Makers of the Modern World*, London, 2009.

¹⁴²³ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 717-720 and 726-731. The quote is on p. 719.

¹⁴²⁴ See for instance VELAERS, *Albert I*, 487; COOLSAET, *België*, 223.

Hymans first stressed that the separation of Luxembourg from Belgium in 1839 had occurred against the will of the Luxembourgish people and that the Belgian delegation in Versailles would strive for “a free rapprochement between two peoples” in the form of “a fusion or a personal union [under the Belgian dynasty].” Hymans added that Belgium also desired the revision of the treaties of 1839 because these had “robbed it from a part of Limburg.” Thirdly, the Foreign Minister continued, “it is possible that our allies propose a Belgian annexation of the left bank of the Scheldt.” According to him, the Scheldt indeed was “a Belgian river and does not concern the Netherlands.” Finally, Hymans concluded, “Belgium has a few territorial aspirations to assert in the Congo.”¹⁴²⁵

During the ensuing discussions the Liberal Franck and the Socialist Vandervelde explicitly opposed annexing Dutch territory. Both argued that the populations of Dutch Limburg and especially Zeeland Flanders were resolutely hostile towards Belgian annexation and had actually not even supported the Belgian cause in the 1830s. Efforts to incorporate these territories into the Belgian state, they suggested, had a very limited chance of success and would only trouble relations with the Netherlands. Hymans did not need to intervene; the Prime Minister did it for him. Delacroix, who had apparently accepted Orts’s every word including the organic imagery the Secretary-General regularly adopted, opposed that the population of Zeeland Flanders was not hostile towards Belgium and that it was “an anomaly that they are attached to the Netherlands from which they are separated by the Scheldt.” Baron Ruzette, the aristocratic Agriculture Minister whose lands bordered Zeeland Flanders, even claimed to know that while the upper classes of that region were against annexation, the “mass of the population” would be “happy” to see the border which separated them from Belgium, “disappear by annexation.”¹⁴²⁶

The statements of these Catholic Ministers made Hymans’s wording sound much more moderate. The Foreign Minister could thus limit himself to restating that the Belgian delegation would not explicitly pursue annexations of Dutch territory but would neither “a priori reject this solution if “the Powers” deemed it necessary for the defence of Belgium. He also suggested that “when one embarks upon a negotiation, one should not commence by saying that to avoid difficulties one is ready to renounce the pursued aim.” Undoubtedly, this piece of advice served primarily to underline his own diplomatic expertise. Hymans concluded that “posterity will be merciless if we do not grasp this unique occasion to remake Belgium.” These words seem to have made an impression on Franck, who remained silent.

¹⁴²⁵ ARA, I 252/01 , “Notulen van de Ministerraad”, 16 December 1918.

¹⁴²⁶ ARA, I 252/01 , “Notulen van de Ministerraad”, 16 December 1918.

Even Vandervelde said that he would accept territorial changes, albeit not against the will of the local populations.¹⁴²⁷

Apparently, the majority of the government fully accepted the program as it was drafted by Orts and Bassompierre. Not even the King, who presided the meeting, had expressed the slightest disapproval. The Ministers also agreed to send one Catholic, one Liberal, and one Socialist as plenipotentiaries to Versailles, thus respecting the balance between the parties which formed the government of national union. Apart from the leader Hymans, these were the Catholic Van den Heuvel and the Socialist Vandervelde. The delegation could count on the aid of more than fifty juridical and technical experts and a few junior diplomats. Because Vandervelde and Van den Heuvel devoted most of their attention to labour issues and to the question of reparations respectively, the formulation – or rather, suggestion – of Belgium’s territorial demands was largely up to Hymans. For this job, he could however count on the many members of the Belgian delegation who ranked among the country’s most ardent annexationists.¹⁴²⁸ In conjunction with Orts and Bassompierre, these men helped the Belgian Foreign Minister to defend the country’s territorial claims.

Versailles

After the peace conference had started, it would not take long before the self-determination principle created difficulties for the Belgian delegation. In exchange for Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders, Hymans and his collaborators had suggested, the Netherlands could be compensated with German borderlands. However, the Big Three soon realized that the populations living in these lands did absolutely not want to become part of the Netherlands. Neither did the Dutch wish to incorporate them in their country. This certainly facilitated their decision in June 1919 that the border between Belgium and the Netherlands could undergo no changes.¹⁴²⁹ Discussing these events, Riemens argues that the Dutch delegates had persuaded the Big Three to reject Belgian annexationist claims because they had successfully adopted the language and style of the new international political culture, which in Riemens’s book corresponds more or less with Wilson’s ideas about New Diplomacy and the expectations it

¹⁴²⁷ ARA, I 252/01 , “Notulen van de Ministerraad”, 16 December 1918.

¹⁴²⁸ MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 91-93; DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 732-733.

¹⁴²⁹ MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 146-153. Surely, as Rik Coolsaet points out, in the cases of the British and American delegations this decision was primarily grounded in conviction that the transfer of Zeeland Flanders to Belgium would facilitate the construction of a German submarine base in Antwerp in the event of a new military conflict. See COOLSAET, *België*, 228.

created.¹⁴³⁰ Perhaps, however, more important reasons for the Dutch success were that the implicit annexationist demands of Belgian delegates fundamentally contradicted the principle of the self-determination of the peoples.

By the end of June 1919 resistance from Clemenceau and manifestations of displeasure in the Luxembourgish press had also rendered a personal union, let alone a fusion, between Belgium and Luxembourg impossible. All the lands that the Belgian delegation obtained out of the peace conference were a few cantons on Belgium's eastern border and the mandated territories of Ruanda and Urundi in East Africa. Belgian annexationists had always considered these lands of rather marginal importance.¹⁴³¹

We know that Orts and Bassompierre, although they were not officially part of the Belgian delegation and mostly travelled between Brussels and Paris instead, were very closely involved in determining Belgium's attitude in territorial issues at the peace conference.¹⁴³² But what about the members of the government? After the conference had started, it took a while before the actions of the Belgian delegation were discussed in the Council of Ministers. This led Jaspar to complain that there was not enough contact between the government and the delegation.¹⁴³³ Although Hymans came to Brussels in early March to give an overview of the proceedings of the Belgian delegation, only two months later the Council really discussed the attitude the delegates should adopt. At four consecutive sessions held between late April and mid-May 1919, it became clear that relations with the Netherlands still constituted the main topic of dissension. However, Franck and Vandervelde were still the only ones who opposed working towards annexations of Zeeland Flanders and Dutch Limburg. While Franck repeated that these territories had never been Belgian and that any efforts to obtain them would only damage Belgium's financial claims, Vandervelde argued that both the Dutch and Belgian public opinion were against it and that the Big Three only allowed annexations if that benefited their own countries. Guided by the pleas of Renkin and Delacroix, all the other ministers were in favour of granting the Foreign Minister "full authority" to revise the treaties of 1839 "in full and complete liberty." The only amendment, put forward by Anseele, stated that the Belgian government would only agree to annexations that were not forced upon the Netherlands: they had to have "the full and complete agreement of Holland."¹⁴³⁴

¹⁴³⁰ RIEMENS, *De passie voor vrede*, 130-138.

¹⁴³¹ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 752-854; COOLSAET, *België*, 228-229.

¹⁴³² See for instance DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 775-776; and MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 95.

¹⁴³³ ARA, I 252/01, "Notulen van de Ministerraad", 16 December 1918.

¹⁴³⁴ ARA, I 252/01, "Notulen van de Ministerraad", 19, 21, 24, and 28 February, 3 March, 22, 26, and 30 April, and 2, 3, 4, and 15 May 1919. See especially the meetings of 30 April and 15 May.

Since the Dutch government had repeatedly and clearly indicated that it absolutely opposed any territorial transfer, it is remarkable that so many members of the government still believed that the peace conference would lead to a greater country which, and this surely was the most important motive of most Ministers, was better defensible. Also the future Foreign Minister Jaspar ranked among them. However, his accepting Hymans's territorial policy does not mean that he agreed on its relative importance. In private letters to Delacroix, Jaspar indeed reproached the country's "professional diplomats", by whom he meant Orts, Bassompierre, and by extension the entire Foreign Ministry, for having occupied themselves only with territorial issues and having neglected the more important matter of the reparations. Their neglect of these financial issues, Jaspar believed, sprung from both incompetence and unwillingness.¹⁴³⁵ At any rate, the resolution of the Big Three (and Orlando) of 4 June 1919 which excluded territorial transfer by the Netherlands, must have made most members of the government realize that this track was no longer open.

Keeping Up Illusions

While Hymans appears to have moderated his territorial aspirations towards the end of the peace conference, Orts and Bassompierre had not given up their dreams of a Greater Belgium within Europe and continued to work towards annexations of Dutch territories. As ever, Nothomb was still stimulating them by gravely exaggerating pro-Belgian sentiments in these lands. Discussing the attitudes of Hymans, Orts, Bassompierre, and their collaborators towards Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders, Maria De Waele often labels these actors more generally as "Foreign Affairs" or even "Belgium". Sometimes, however, she is more specific but seems to incorrectly assess the agency of the different members of this leadership. This then leads to contradictions in her opinions about the views of respectively Hymans, Orts and Bassompierre during the negotiations between Belgium and the Netherlands which ensued from the peace conference. These negotiations were carried out from the Summer of 1919 onwards in the so-called Commission of Fourteen that also included representatives of the Big Three and aimed at revising the treaties of 1839. De Waele ascribes all the agency in drafting the instructions for the Belgian negotiators to Hymans. These instructions, drafted in late July 1919, stated that the country's negotiators should still suggest to the commission that only alterations of the border could solve Belgium's security problems and guarantee its economic development. Since, as De Waele rightly argues, Hymans had already experienced at the

¹⁴³⁵ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 863-864.

peace conference that such “half-hearted references to territorial adaptations highly irritated the Allies and the Dutch”, she concludes that the Foreign Minister “had learned very little” from his experiences. Yet, one could argue, to what extent did Hymans really determine the contents of these instructions? While he mostly approved them, such instructions were generally drafted by the Political Director. Also the argumentation contained in them reflected much more closely Bassompierre’s point of view than that of Hymans. It indeed stressed, in the case of Dutch Limburg, some of the Political Director’s core ideas, such as the province’s “historical ties” with Belgium and its inhabitants’ “spontaneous tendencies towards a rapprochement to our country.”¹⁴³⁶ Perhaps unconsciously, De Waele suggests elsewhere in her text that during the negotiations about the revision of the Treaty of 1839 the Political Director and the Secretary-General, rather than the Foreign Minister, decided about how Belgian foreign policy should be executed.¹⁴³⁷ This confirms Sally Marks’s contention that from early 1918 onwards, Hymans “gradually fell under the influence of the senior officials at the ministry, notably Albert de Bassompierre and Pierre Orts.”¹⁴³⁸

The Council of Ministers did not intervene in the appointment of the country’s representatives in the Commission of Fourteen.¹⁴³⁹ The choice was made inside the Foreign Ministry and fell on two staunch annexationists. In addition to Orts himself, who took upon himself the defence of the country’s military and strategic demands, the choice had fallen on the Catholic politician Paul Segers. Understandably, the Dutch government deeply mistrusted both of them. This mistrust turned into deep anger after the first speeches of the Belgian delegates. In order to support his implicit claim for a border change, Segers resorted to a historical argumentation in rather aggressive terms, stating that the Netherlands had been the country’s hereditary enemy ever since the Early Middle Ages. This adversity, Segers continued, had induced the Netherlands at the Conference of Munster in 1648 to “economically assassinate Belgium”, and this assassination had left its traces up to the present day. Orts conveyed the same implicit territorial aspirations but drew on more recent historical argumentation to illustrate how the current Belgian-Dutch border was the product of nefarious Prussian intrigues. The Secretary-General then built upon this suggestion of a Dutch pro-German attitude to openly declare that during the war which had just ended, the Netherlands had indeed favoured Berlin over London and Paris. In another part of his speech, Orts hoped

¹⁴³⁶ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 1257-1271.

¹⁴³⁷ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 1335-1336. Discussing Belgian-Dutch negotiations in January 1920, De Waele claims, Bassompierre “exhorted” Hymans to lobby with the Belgian Prime Minister Delacroix for the funding of a pro-Belgian newspaper in Limburg.

¹⁴³⁸ MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 44. See also HAAG, *Le comte Charles de Broqueville*, 682.

¹⁴³⁹ ARA, I 252/01, “Notulen van de Ministerraad”, 12 July 1919.

that the commissioners would show some sympathy for his compatriots who, during and after the war, had urged for the incorporation of Dutch Limburg into their country. On the one hand, he argued, these people merely responded to “sentiments of attachment to Belgium which, after eighty years of separation, persist in numerous Limburgers.” On the other hand, these people realized that since the Meuse ran through it, the possession of Dutch Limburg was necessary for the defence of their country. Because this solution was no longer possible, Orts concluded, the Belgian army should be allowed to defend the Meuse in collaboration with Dutch troops.¹⁴⁴⁰

However, if by then there still existed a spark of good will in Dutch government circles towards the Belgian annexationists, it immediately vanished when a few weeks later the Dutch press got hold of a note originating from the Foreign Ministry and dated 3 July 1919. This note, written after the June resolution at the peace conference which excluded any territorial changes between Belgium and the Netherlands, stated that “all Belgian agents in [Dutch] Limburg have to help prepare the return of this province to the Mother Country.” Although Hymans tried his best to minimize the impact of the note, arguing that the date was falsified and that he had not signed it, in The Hague “the bomb had burst”, to use the expression of Baron Fallon. Only now, in late August 1919, did Hymans start to act more firmly in controlling the annexationist machinations. First he cut all ties between Nothomb and the Department (although he could not prevent Orts and Bassompierre to continue engaging in private conversations with the young nationalist). The Foreign Minister was by now fully aware that the boisterous and aggressive actions of the *Comité de Politique Nationale* had irreparably damaged Belgium’s ambitions with regards to both Luxemburg and the Netherlands.¹⁴⁴¹ During a reunion of the Council of Ministers in which he reported about the proceedings of the Belgian-Dutch negotiations, Hymans openly declared that “the nationalist policy of a few personalities and of newspapers” such as *Le Soir* seriously damaged Belgium’s interests. With the exception of Renkin, whose close friend Patris was the author of many ‘nationalist’ articles in *Le Soir*, all Ministers accepted the Foreign Minister’s point of view.¹⁴⁴² The annexationist campaign, Hymans would soon learn, indeed incited the Dutch government to officially reject any military cooperation with its Belgian counterpart. For Orts, who wanted to subordinate the economic negotiations between Belgium and the Netherlands to fruitful discussions about the political and military future of both countries,

¹⁴⁴⁰ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 1273-1274 and 1281-1293.

¹⁴⁴¹ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 1294-1304. The quotes are on pp. 1295

¹⁴⁴² ARA, I 252/01, “Notulen van de Ministerraad”, 5 September 1919.

this was the sign to blow up the negotiations. Again, Hymans acted firmly and convinced his Secretary-General to focus henceforth on an economic rapprochement with the Netherlands.¹⁴⁴³

Maria De Waele states that by Autumn 1919, “Foreign Affairs had given up its annexationist plans.” The lack of specified human agents obscures what this actually means. Had Orts and Bassompierre really given up their territorial aspirations? Did the Foreign Ministry’s leadership, possibly under the influence of Hymans, resolutely opt for a policy away from territorial expansion and towards economic cooperation? At any rate, Belgian annexationist propaganda in the Netherlands gradually diminished and so did Dutch suspicions of the Belgian government’s involvement in these campaigns.¹⁴⁴⁴ Yet Orts and Bassompierre had many difficulties accepting the Belgian territorial status quo. In early October 1919 rumours reached the Foreign Ministry that the Netherlands had placed an order of, if Bassompierre is to be believed, “20.000 machine guns” and “360 Big guns.” In the company of Orts, Hymans, and others, the Political Director immediately referred to “August 1830, when the Dutch took us unprepared.” He also suggested “to examine what measures of precaution must be taken.” After Hymans declared that he would never agree to a policy leading to war, Bassompierre replied that war “might be forced upon us” and that the Foreign Minister’s words were “dangerous because if it was known publicly that Belgium would shun war in any case, the Dutch would become all the more determined to give us nothing & to bluff us by war menaces.” According to Bassompierre, Hymans then “got angry and spoke of the policy that one makes him do etc..” The Political Director nevertheless maintained his point of view, “to the evident delight of Orts.”¹⁴⁴⁵

At the very least, these comments reveal that the policy change of “Foreign Affairs” did not materialize without an internal struggle and that Hymans experienced considerable difficulties inciting his closest collaborators to more moderateness. Orts and Bassompierre indeed still let their emotions have the better of them in the way they approached Belgian foreign policy. For the Political Director, emotions even seem to have constituted a fundamental means of diplomacy. A year earlier, he had even told the French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou that “French people generally realize little how much we hate Germany” and that “common hatred will be [the] bond between France & Belgium, more solid than a political alliance.” Bassompierre appeared to have been genuinely surprised

¹⁴⁴³ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 1309-1325.

¹⁴⁴⁴ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 1326-1339.

¹⁴⁴⁵ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 1 October 1919.

noticing that Barthou seemed “struck” by these comments.¹⁴⁴⁶ Given the Political Director’s disposition, it could be expected that once he became more involved in the Belgian-Dutch negotiations, things would get out of hand. Of course, it would be exaggerated to ascribe the failure of these negotiations entirely to Bassompierre. Rather, the Political Director provided the straw that broke the camel’s back. In April 1920, a stalemate had been reached over the Wielingen, a channel that led from the North Sea to the Scheldt and thus constituted part of the river’s entry for ships heading towards the Antwerp harbour. Both Belgian and Dutch negotiators claimed full sovereignty over the Wielingen. This led Nothomb’s *Comité de Politique Nationale* and Neuray’s *La Nation belge* to revive their anti-Dutch campaigns. During an encounter with Bassompierre, the Dutch diplomat John Loudon capitalized on these actions to emphasize that there was absolutely no pro-Belgian current in Zeeland Flanders nor in Limburg. Easily provoked, Bassompierre replied that “if a war was to break out between the two countries, the fight against Holland would be unanimously popular in Belgium.” After Loudon had transmitted the message, the Dutch government reiterated its position about the Wielingen. For Orts, this was the sign to end Belgian-Dutch negotiations. In the remaining months of Hymans’s Foreign Ministership, these were not resumed.¹⁴⁴⁷

In those months, relations between Belgium and Luxembourg were not much better. Already in the Summer of 1919, Orts and Bassompierre had to acknowledge that their territorial ambitions could not be satisfied. It was actually Ligne who insisted with the Foreign Ministry’s leadership that a political union of Belgium and Luxembourg was no longer possible and who continued to stress that Orts, Bassompierre and Hymans should focus on economic rapprochement. Apparently the diplomat had played high to obtain a policy change. In a letter to Count Guillaume d’Arschot-Schoonhoven, the King’s new *chef de cabinet*, Ligne claimed to have told “these misters of Foreign Affairs that if my attitude has created difficulties I am ready to be repudiated.”¹⁴⁴⁸ If this argument did not convince Hymans and his collaborators, the results of a referendum held among the Luxembourgish population in late September 1919 surely did. It revealed that only five per cent preferred another dynasty, which would then likely be the Belgian royal family, while three out of four Luxembourgers favoured maintaining the current dynasty on the throne, albeit in the person of Marie-Adélaïde’s younger sister Charlotte. However, also plans for an economic union with Luxembourg suffered a serious setback, for a simultaneously held referendum revealed that

¹⁴⁴⁶ SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 5 October 1918.

¹⁴⁴⁷ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 1393-1395.

¹⁴⁴⁸ 1909-1914 and 1919-1934, n° 683, Albert de Ligne to Albert de Belgique, 25 June 1919.

only a quarter of the population opted for economic cooperation with Belgium, against three quarters for France.¹⁴⁴⁹ After consulting with Orts and Bassompierre, Hymans decided to consider the economic negotiations with Luxemburg as closed and recalled Ligne.¹⁴⁵⁰

Disillusions

Eventually, a project treaty for the foundation of a Belgo-Luxembourgish Economic Union was signed in May 1921. Two significant events contributed to its materialization. The first, minor event, a year earlier, was the resumption of official relations between both countries by the sending of a new Belgian minister plenipotentiary. This indeed meant that the Belgian government diplomatically recognized the new Grand Duchess Charlotte. The choice of an anti-annexionist diplomat with roots in Luxembourg moreover suggested that the Foreign Ministry's leadership was now prepared to truly work towards a better understanding with the Luxembourgish government. After Jules Lejeune de Münsbach had presented his letters of accreditation to Charlotte in mid-June 1914, he started manoeuvring to erase all traces of the Belgian annexationist campaigns. First, he avoided all contact with Ligne's former collaborators and completely repudiated the policy of his predecessor. Although more moderate than Orts and Bassompierre, the prince had nevertheless become closely associated with Belgian annexationist machinations. Moreover, Ligne had repeatedly meddled in Luxembourgish domestic affairs and fiercely opposed the Luxembourgish referendums, convinced that "it is crazy to ask a gooseherd or crossing sweepers to pronounce themselves about the advantages of an economic union with France or Belgium." While Ligne had always experienced difficulties coming to terms with democratization, it really angered him when its consequences were bound to disadvantage his country. Although Lejeune was not a fan of democratization either, he took care to reckon with Luxembourgish public opinion. A second aspect of his policy indeed was to urge Hymans to prevent actions of the *Comité de Politique Nationale* as well as Belgian press attacks against Luxembourg (which, of course, Hymans was not capable of doing). Third, Lejeune showed himself extremely amiable towards the Luxembourgish Prime Minister and Grand Duchess, repeatedly invited them to copious dinner parties at the Belgian legation and treated them with utmost consideration. The diplomat moreover ignored comments from Orts and Bassompierre, whose personal aversion towards the Luxembourgish leadership incited them to accuse Lejeune of going too far with

¹⁴⁴⁹ MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 250-251.

¹⁴⁵⁰ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 2 October 1919.

his charm offensive.¹⁴⁵¹ When Bassompierre in a private letter admonished him not to discourage Luxembourgish friends of Belgium and Belgian agents in the Grand Duchy “by rejecting everything that has been done and said over the past two years,” Lejeune laconically wrote on top of it that “this letter is not proof of great political capacity!”¹⁴⁵²

Surely, the Political Director’s attitude was partly instigated by his frustration that the second significant event which contributed to the materialization of the Belgo-Luxembourgish Economic Union as yet failed to yield. In early 1920, the French government had agreed to abandon its struggle with Belgium about the economic dominance over Luxembourg in exchange for a Franco-Belgian Military treaty. Authorities in Paris indeed wished to force the German government by means of military actions into living up to the stipulations of the Versailles Treaty. However, fearing diplomatic isolation, they did not wish to go at it alone. The Foreign Ministry’s leadership accepted this accord only with considerable reluctance and after intense discussions between Orts, Bassompierre, Gaiffier, Hymans, Prime Minister Delacroix and the Defence Minister Paul-Émile Janson. The decision was eventually taken by the three members of the government involved. This was indeed not the kind of security mechanism that Orts and Bassompierre had in mind. For many years, they had worked towards the abandonment of neutrality with the explicit aim of obtaining a treaty of guarantee signed by both France and Great-Britain. Hymans, Delacroix and Janson were eventually swayed by the prospect of an economic union with Luxembourg, which for Orts and Bassompierre had the sole advantage of opening perspectives for the control of the Grand Duchy’s foreign policy.¹⁴⁵³ As such, Luxembourgish reluctance to come to an agreement only added to the frustration Orts and Bassompierre must have felt when realizing that the members of the government had taken a foreign policy decision against their will. Both functionaries probably knew that the government’s control over foreign policy making would eventually subject this process to party-political struggles.

Indirectly, the Franco-Belgian Military treaty ended Hymans’s Foreign Ministership and contributed to both Orts’s and Bassompierre’s departures from the Department. At the end of July 1920 the Belgian government had refused to allow a French request to use the Antwerp harbour for shipping weaponry to Poland, then at war with Soviet Russia. However, after French threats to launch an anti-government campaign in the Belgian Francophile press,

¹⁴⁵¹ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 806-807 and 1085-1087. The quote is on p. 806.

¹⁴⁵² ARA, I 147, “Papiers de Jules Le Jeune”, n° 10, Albert de Bassompierre to Jules Lejeune de Münsbach, 10 July 1920.

¹⁴⁵³ COOLSAET, *België en zijn buitenlandse politiek*, 237-239; DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 1094-1100; SOMA, AB 2515, “Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941”, 14 October and 2 and 3 November 1919.

Delacroix decided to turn a blind eye to the transit. The subsequent exposure of their decision incited Hymans, in favour of the transit, to hand in his resignation.¹⁴⁵⁴

For Orts and Bassompierre, this was the sign to gradually work their way towards the exit as well. However, their more profound reasons for doing so lay elsewhere, namely in the failure of their quest for a Greater Belgium and in the loss of Belgian military independence. At least partly, both the Political Director and the Secretary-General attributed this failure to the apathy of the Belgian public. In April 1919, Bassompierre started to realize that the nation which he had been glorifying for more than four years was constituted primarily of people who did not manifest the energetic passion for the country's expansion that he had expected. In his diaries, he even wrote that this awareness had contributed to his "collapse" a month before. "Brussels seems stuffy & fusty & the people are full of very small ideas," Bassompierre confided, specifying that "the public you meet in trams & out in streets is too vulgar & rough for words." He claimed to "feel ashamed when I compare with the British or French public." It made him wonder why he was sacrificing his health and led him, three months later, to consider asking Hymans for a diplomatic posting abroad. Yet, as we have seen, in February 1919 Bassompierre had feared that, by contrast, "the Belgians" would feel dissatisfied if their war sacrifices would not lead to a sizeable increase of their country's territory. When rumours reached Brussels that the Luxembourgish referendums of September 1919 would have negative outcomes for Belgium, these sentiments came to the surface again. Predicting that "successive humiliations for Belgium" would lead "the people to suddenly come to hate the fact that we are a small country", Bassompierre was afraid that they would look for a scapegoat, which would be him. Again, he saw a diplomatic posting abroad as a way out.¹⁴⁵⁵ After Hymans left the Foreign Ministry, it only took a few months before Bassompierre was named Belgium's ambassador to the Japanese Emperor.¹⁴⁵⁶

Orts was more consistent in his views but also in his case, disillusion in the Belgian public contributed to deteriorating his health. In late December 1919, the disappearance of all perspectives of territorial expansion and the fact that Belgium would have to sacrifice its military independence to obtain at least some influence in Luxembourg, had almost driven Orts to a depression.¹⁴⁵⁷ He informed Hymans that he wished to leave the diplomatic career.

¹⁴⁵⁴ COOLSAET, *België en zijn buitenlandse politiek*, 240; HYMANS, *Mémoires*, 504-506.

¹⁴⁵⁵ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 2 April, 24 June and 8 September 1919.

¹⁴⁵⁶ ADCB, 1921, 143.

¹⁴⁵⁷ See AKP, "Reproductie brieven Koning Albert 1919-1934", Albert de Belgique to Pierre Orts, 16 February 1920; and ARA, T 225, "Papiers de Borchgrave", n° 310, Albert de Bassompierre to Roger de Borchgrave, 12 January 1920.

The Foreign Minister immediately consulted with the King, who seemed to agree that the man who knew almost everything about issues of Belgian security could not just leave the Foreign Ministry in the difficult international circumstances that the country was going through. Albert even wrote to Orts's wife, asking her to convince her husband to stay on. She replied to the King with an explanation why Orts was determined to go. "I believe that what has especially driven him to take this decision," she wrote, "is his awareness of the impossibility to guide Belgian foreign policy in a constant and coordinated direction." According to his wife, Orts attributed the deceptions that "Belgium" had experienced in Versailles to "this absence of cohesion, which has characterised the government throughout the war and after the armistice." This, of course, could easily be read as an implicit criticism of what during the war was labelled as the King's policy.¹⁴⁵⁸ On the other hand, however, it also appealed to sentiments which the King shared, namely those concerning the constant squabbling of politicians. This was the direction Orts's wife wisely guided her argument. The quarrelling of politicians, she suggested, had contributed to the disarray of Belgian public opinion and had even led her husband to question whether the often maligned neutrality did not constitute "an indispensable protection against the incapacity of our nation to govern itself amidst international difficulties."¹⁴⁵⁹

In his memoirs, Orts was much more critical of the Belgian public. "Without a doubt the most decisive cause of the failure of the Paris negotiations," he argued, "was the absence of support of public opinion in Belgium for our policy." According to Orts, this lack of support found its origins in the Belgian's "surprising ignorance of his country's history." Even in the intellectual and high political milieus, he explained, less than one out of a hundred knew about the Treaties of 1839, while probably even less had read Banning's *Considérations*. Like Bassompierre, Orts claimed he started to realize this when returning to Belgium after the war. In his opinion, the sight of so much "ignorance" contrasted sharply with the "perspicacity" of their "glorious predecessors of 1830", who "were of a different calibre." To revive the memory of these men, Orts devoted himself to "enlighten the press and through it the public." However, he regretfully found, Belgian journalists were imbued "with an extraordinary maladroitness" and did too little with the communiqués he sent them, particularly with those regarding the Foreign Ministry's territorial and security policies. As a result, Orts continued, "the public had a lot of difficulties saying what it desired outside of

¹⁴⁵⁸ Orts admitted this in his memoirs, see ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", 183.

¹⁴⁵⁹ AKP, "Reproductie brieven Koning Albert 1919-1934", Albert de Belgique to Georgina Peltzer, 21 December 1919; ARA, I 184, "Papiers Orts", n° 389, "Souvenirs de ma carrière", Annexe 10: Georgina Peltzer to Albert de Belgique, 27 December 1919.

reparations.” However, both at the time and while writing his memoirs, in Orts’s view economic and financial issues were still subordinate to the realization of a Greater Belgium with natural borders. As such, Orts continued to regret that “Belgian opinion” had not united on other points, because then “England and France had no doubt hesitated to alienate themselves from it by thwarting unanimously expressed national aspirations.” Instead of uniting, Orts wrote, Belgian opinion had even let itself, just like before the war, succumb to parochialism. This, he concluded, explained why prominent figures from Liège had declared themselves “resolutely hostile towards any border change in Limburg” by arguing that “there were already too much Flemings in Belgium.”¹⁴⁶⁰

In a long-drawn-out discourse written down in his memoirs, Orts tried to connect the reasons for his leaving the Foreign Ministry to decisions taken in Versailles by Wilson and his acolytes. These had indeed created a new world order in which he no longer felt at home. However, his memoirs also confirm and render explicit the ideas expressed in the correspondence between his wife and the King in late 1919. He presented the materialization of the Franco-Belgian Military treaty as essentially the decision of the Prime Minister.¹⁴⁶¹ Having always opposed the agreement, Orts claimed it dissipated his last illusions about his influence on the conduct of Belgian foreign policy. “The accumulation of deceptions,” he concluded, “made me lose faith and with faith all desire for the struggle.” Orts left the Foreign Ministry in late 1920, his heart “filled with a little bitterness.” He had never solicited the powers he had been invested with, he claimed. Ever a Congo generation diplomat, Orts’s “sole ambition was to preside to the direction of our colonial empire.”¹⁴⁶² Although this never materialized, Orts did enter the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations as an elected member, which he remained for over twenty years.¹⁴⁶³

If the reasons Orts invoked for his departure correspond with actual changes in the sources of influence on Belgian diplomacy, it seems that the shift of foreign policy making, described by Riemens at the onset of this section, from inside the Foreign Ministries to the hands of government leaders transpired somewhat belatedly in Belgium. According to Coolsaet, the interwar years were decisive in expanding the role of the government in foreign policy making and in reducing the scope of the professional diplomat, who turned “from a

¹⁴⁶⁰ ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 141-144.

¹⁴⁶¹ Whereas the Minister who actually pushed it through was Janson, a Liberal like Orts. See COOLSAET, *België*, 240-241. See also HAAG, Henri, “La démission de Paul Hymans et la fin du second gouvernement Delacroix (Juillet-novembre 1920)”, in *Mélanges*, 393-413.

¹⁴⁶² ARA, I 184, “Papiers Orts”, n° 389, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, 166-183. The quotes are on pp. 182 and 183.

¹⁴⁶³ See VIJGEN, Ingeborg, “Koloniale zaken op de agenda van de Volkenbond nieuwe regels voor hetzelfde spel? – Ervaringen van Pierre Orts in Genève”, in VAN KEMSEKE, *Diplomatieke Cultuur*, 185-202.

high dignitary into a high official dependent from and subordinate to the government.”¹⁴⁶⁴ If this is really true, Orts and Bassompierre were probably the last ones to enjoy the freedom of olden times.

§ 3. The King as Foreign Policy Actor in the Aftermath of the First World War

The previous sections have highlighted the role of the Foreign Ministry's leadership, and more specifically of the Political Director and the Secretary-General in formulating and executing Belgian foreign policy. At least until the end of the Paris peace conference, the influence of these men seems to have been decisive in that domain. This was the result of an evolution in the division of power that had set in during the decades before the First World War. After the foundation of the Belgian state, the country's sovereigns had for many years determined the course of its foreign policy. In this process they came more and more to rely on leading officials of the Department's administrative career and on Belgium's top diplomats, especially where Belgium's European policy was concerned. In the latter years of Leopold II's reign, the royal influence over Belgian diplomacy gravely diminished and its course was henceforth determined by the dean of the diplomatic corps Greindl, by the Secretary-General Lambermont and by the Political Director Arendt. By the time the war broke out, these men had died or retired. So had Leopold II. As we have seen, his death indirectly led to a reappraisal of the monarchy in the sense that the new king actively promoted an image of himself as a sovereign who cared for his people. In the struggle between the government and the King that arose in the first months of the war, the sovereign also reaffirmed his authority in foreign policy issues with the help of the country's new top diplomat Beyens and the Foreign Ministry's new Secretary-General Van der Elst. Machinations from an alliance of government members and junior employees of the Department managed to oust the King's aides. In the process, these junior diplomats and functionaries rather than their political allies seem to have usurped the power over the conduct of Belgian foreign policy. However, as the words of the formerly junior diplomat Pierre Orts (and of his wife) have revealed, by the Summer of 1920 both the government and public opinion, as represented by Parliament and the press, had established an influence on Belgian foreign policy which sizeably exceeded their pre-war impact. Yet before going into what this

¹⁴⁶⁴ COOLSAET, *België*, 321.

meant for Belgian diplomats, it is necessary to assess the role of the King in foreign policy issues after the armistice.

Delacroix, Janson, and Hymans knew that the Franco-Belgian Military treaty would perturb large sections of Belgian public opinion, which would fear that the country would be drawn into French military adventures. This was why its stipulations remained secret for quite some time. As Coolsaet claims, not only Parliament and the rest of the government but neither the King had been acquainted with the contents of the Franco-Belgian Military treaty at the time of its approval.¹⁴⁶⁵ This claim fits in perfectly with Coolsaet's argument that after the First World War the royal authority over Belgian foreign policy further eroded as a result of shifting domestic political power relations (which in turn supports the connecting thread of his book that "Belgian foreign policy is foremost the continuation of domestic politics with other means"?¹⁴⁶⁶ Although Coolsaet is basically right and convincingly illustrates his claim throughout his work, he devotes little attention to the King's influence between the armistice and the end of Hymans's Foreign Ministership.

In the few months that followed the end of the war, Albert might indeed not have manifested himself too much on the international scene. However, already before the opening of the Paris peace conference, the King had lobbied with both the French President Raymond Poincaré and with the influential British statesman the Earl Curzon of Kedleston to obtain a Belgian annexation of Luxembourg. For Albert, this was not mere compliance with the policy advocated by the government at the instigation of the Foreign Ministry. The King primarily wished to avoid the incorporation of Luxembourg by France in case the Grand Duchy would not maintain its independence. A French annexation would indeed contribute to the encirclement of Belgium.¹⁴⁶⁷ Not long after the conference had started, Albert also pleaded his country's case with Wilson, although he wisely avoided the Luxembourg question and focused instead on asking the American President's help to grant Belgium priority status in matters of the reparations that the German government would have to pay.¹⁴⁶⁸

We know that Hymans kept Albert closely informed about the proceedings of the Belgian delegation in Versailles, also when negotiations with the Netherlands were

¹⁴⁶⁵ COOLSAET, *België*, 239.

¹⁴⁶⁶ COOLSAET, *België*, 321-322 and 555.

¹⁴⁶⁷ THIELEMANS, "Lettres du Roi Albert 1916-1918", 498-500; AKP, "Reproductie brieven Koning Albert 1919-1934", Albert de Belgique to the Earl Curzon of Kedleston, 16 January 1919.

¹⁴⁶⁸ AKP, "Reproductie brieven Koning Albert 1919-1934", Albert de Belgique to the Earl Curzon of Kedleston, 10 February 1919.

concerned.¹⁴⁶⁹ The Foreign Minister even convinced the King to come to Paris and personally plead the Belgian case. Albert's conversations with the Big Four dealt above all else with the reparations issue but some attention was devoted to the Luxembourg question as well. With regard to these matters, he acted in perfect accordance with the government policy. However, in conversations with a leading British Foreign Ministry official the day before, the King explicitly stated that he had no desire for territorial gains at the expense of the Netherlands.¹⁴⁷⁰ This, of course, ran counter to the message that the government, under the influence of the annexationists from within its ranks and from within the Foreign Ministry, had agreed to implicitly convey at the conference. Orts had tried to convince Albert to bring up the government's territorial claims in Zeeland Flanders and Luxembourg, but earlier conversations with Curzon had already confirmed his conviction that Belgium would not obtain an inch of Dutch territory.¹⁴⁷¹

According to Velaers, Albert's performance made an impression. However, the King's biographer has to admit that it had little results.¹⁴⁷² On the whole, the Versailles treaty indeed proved a major deception for large sections of Belgian public opinion. As we have seen, the Belgian government had indeed agreed upon a policy with three spearheads. The country's delegation in Versailles had managed to acquire only a negligible territorial expansion, while also the issue of the replacement of obligatory neutrality had not led to a satisfactory solution. The system of collective security in the framework of the League of Nations was widely perceived as inadequate.¹⁴⁷³ With regards to the third spearhead, namely the financial issue, results were a little better but still far removed from the government's aim of obtaining complete reparations for the damage the country had suffered. In general, parliament and the press cared less about the territorial and security issues, but showed themselves particularly disappointed about the financial and economic outcomes of the conference.¹⁴⁷⁴

Acting on the advice of his secretary, the King tried to calm down public sentiments by publishing an open letter to the Prime Minister. Its core message was that the Belgian people had to leave the past behind and look to the future because the reconstruction of the country required the united effort of all the social classes and would allow "to remake a more

¹⁴⁶⁹ See for instance ARA, T 225, "Papiers de Borchgrave", n° 310, Paul Hymans to Roger de Borchgrave, 25 May 1919.

¹⁴⁷⁰ MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 119-120, 187-189, 229-230, and 262; COOLSAET, *België en zijn buitenlandse politiek*, 226; WILLEQUET, *Albert I*, 137; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 489-490.

¹⁴⁷¹ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 791-795.

¹⁴⁷² VELAERS, *Albert I*, 490-491.

¹⁴⁷³ See VAN ALSTEIN, Maarten, "'No more war?': Belgian reception of the League of Nations and Arbitration after the First World War", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 18, 2007, 133-153.

¹⁴⁷⁴ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 859-863.

beautiful Belgium.” Albert alerted not only the people to their civic duty but also appealed to the patriotic sentiments of the government, parliament and the press. Of course, Albert had not drafted the letter in consultation with his secretary alone. Also the government had been involved. This allowed Hymans to press for changes to the first sentences of the letter. The original version read that “the peace ... had not given Belgium the totality of satisfactions which the weapon feats of its soldiers and the steadfast resistance of its population seem to entitle it to.” As principal negotiator of the treaty, the Foreign Minister understandably preferred to face parliament and the press without the King criticizing his work. In the final version, the royal evaluation of the peace treaty’s stipulation regarding Belgium was placed a little further in the text and considerably softened.¹⁴⁷⁵

The royal letter received unanimously positive press coverage. This was largely due to the King’s personal popularity and prestige. Laurence van Ypersele argues that ever since the start of his reign in late 1909, Albert and his entourage meticulously constructed the royal image as a symbol of the Belgian nation. A charm offensive towards the media led journalists to start referring to Albert as ‘our’ King, whereas his predecessor Leopold II was still ‘the’ King. Their euphoric and emotional writing styles, Van Ypersele claims, contributed to representing the King as an exalted hero. While Albert’s behaviour during the First World War strengthened this heroic image, his presence near the front gained him the reputation of being the soldier’s best friend. As such, ‘the soldier king’ symbolized Belgian patriotism in one of its purest forms, namely in the solidarity with the men fighting in the trenches for the restoration of their country. After the war, Albert cultivated this more democratic image during his triumphal entry in Brussels less than two weeks after the armistice.¹⁴⁷⁶ In a dramatic royal address in Parliament, he promised the Belgian people to carry through the measures decided in Loppem, among which equal manhood suffrage and full language equality ranked most prominently. As Van Ypersele argues, both the royal speeches and the disclosure in the press of royal letters to leading politicians strengthened the royal authority in domestic politics. Through their publication in the press and thanks to the support they received from the editors of newspapers, the King indeed not only averted political crises but was also conferred, in the words of Van Ypersele, “the right to make authoritative speeches that show the way to the entire nation.” Of course, these manoeuvres had the potential of

¹⁴⁷⁵ ARA, I 252/01 , “Notulen van de Ministerraad”, 1 July 1919; VELAERS, *Albert I*, 493-494 and 1102-1103. For the original version, see AKP, “Reproductie brieven Koning Albert 1919-1934”, Albert de Belgique to Léon Delacroix, 29 June 1918.

¹⁴⁷⁶ VAN YPERSELE, Laurence, “L’image de la monarchie sous le règne du Roi Albert : entre exaltation de la nation et démocratisation de la société”, in WITTE, *Natie en democratie*, 156-164.

discrediting politicians and further increased the royal prestige, as would become abundantly clear in the course of the interwar years.¹⁴⁷⁷

Velaers argues that after the peace in Versailles was signed the King's influence on Belgian foreign policy remained decisive. He illustrates this claim by explaining Albert's involvement in the process which led to the Franco-Belgian military treaty. According to Velaers, "it was [Albert] who pleaded in the Council of Ministers to conclude a Military treaty with France."¹⁴⁷⁸ This is misleading. The King's biographer offers a very detailed discussion of "a hitherto unknown document" to support his argument. In this document, a letter from Albert to Hymans written in late February 1920, the King labelled the French occupation of the Rhineland as imperialist, nationalist and thus dangerous. Albert, so Velaers shows, knew that this policy threatened to isolate the French government internationally, which was the reason why it looked for Belgian support. The King then wrote that "a military treaty with France is unavoidable" because in both countries profound mutual sympathies existed and, more importantly, both France and Belgium faced the same threat from a Germany thirsty for revenge. However, the King made several reservations, which Velaers insufficiently stresses.¹⁴⁷⁹ One was that Albert argued that the accord could not involve Belgium in French imperialist policies and should only go as far as needed to protect the Belgian borders. Another was that the Belgian government should keep trying as long as it took "to associate Great-Britain to this defensive entente."¹⁴⁸⁰ Like in the early war years, the King still believed that Brussels should look to London rather than Paris to safeguard the country's international security. "Convinced that the future of Belgium resides in a sincere community of views with the British", he had written to Curzon less than a year earlier urging the government in London to raise its legation in Brussels to an embassy before the French did. This, Albert had argued, would help "to resist to the French propaganda here which is growing every day."¹⁴⁸¹ At the time when he wrote his letter to Hymans, the King certainly knew that the British government had not revealed much enthusiasm for entering into a Franco-Belgian Military treaty. Yet he was hopeful for the future, finding that "there is currently in England an evolution in the ideas of the leaders, an evolution that we have to follow attentively." Therefore, Albert argued, "it is to our advantage not to hurry; the war is

¹⁴⁷⁷ VAN YPERSELE, "L'image de la monarchie", 165-168.

¹⁴⁷⁸ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 15-16.

¹⁴⁷⁹ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 531-535.

¹⁴⁸⁰ AKP, "Reproductie brieven Koning Albert 1919-1934", Albert de Belgique to Paul Hymans, 25 February 1920.

¹⁴⁸¹ AKP, "Reproductie brieven Koning Albert 1919-1934", Albert de Belgique to the Earl Curzon of Kedleston, 18 April 1919.

not at our doors; time will continuously bring new information.”¹⁴⁸² Apart from these reservations, the King did not link the Military treaty to an economic union with Luxembourg. Aware that the government did, Velaers argues that the King in this way wished to make clear that he did not attach much importance to this connection.¹⁴⁸³

However, is it not equally possible that Albert had not made this connection because he found that he had made his point perfectly clear, namely that he did not wish the Belgian government to conclude a Military treaty with France as long as it had no guarantees that the British government would soon join in? Perhaps he did not make the link because he found the advantages of a Belgo-Luxembourgeois economic union too small to weigh up against the disadvantages of a Military treaty with only France and not Great-Britain. Albert's reluctance would indeed help explain why, as Coolsaet has argued, he had not been informed with the contents of the Franco-Belgian Military treaty at the time of its approval.

At the same time, of course, Hymans's disregard of the King's wishes would confirm Coolsaet's thesis that the royal influence over Belgian foreign policy further waned after the war. However, Coolsaet's argument, which as we have seen was part of his contention that foreign policy is the continuation of domestic politics with other means and which stated that the erosion of the King's influence resulted from internal political democratization and the participation of more political parties in the government, sharply contradicts with the thesis posited by Van Ypersele and Velaers. They argue that the royal influence in domestic politics increased precisely because of the internal political democratization and Albert's role as a force of constancy and prestige in a conflictual party system with unstable coalition governments.¹⁴⁸⁴

Perhaps the ideas Coolsaet could be reconciled with the ideas Van Ypersele and Velaers by slightly adapting them and by hauling the Aristotelian triad of the one, the few, and the many back in. The relationship between these three poles (the King, the government, and the public) changed under the influence of democratization processes which gained momentum because of the war. Yet it did so differently in domestic politics than on the international scene. In the former sphere the at least symbolic power of the King and the actual influence of the public increased at the expense of the authority of the government (and by extension the elected politicians). In foreign policy, by contrast, the power of the few and

¹⁴⁸² AKP, “Reproductie brieven Koning Albert 1919-1934”, Albert de Belgique to Paul Hymans, 25 February 1920.

¹⁴⁸³ VELAERS, *Albert I*, 535.

¹⁴⁸⁴ See VAN YPERSELE, “L’image de la monarchie”, 165-168; and VELAERS, *Albert I*, 583-823.

the many, to whom the government was more and more obliged to answer, increased at the expense of the one (and of his diplomats, as we will see in the next chapter).

There were indeed other than domestic reasons which diminished the King's influence on Belgian diplomacy. These had to do with the changing international political culture in the first decades of the twentieth century. Johannes Paulmann has argued that the relative peacefulness of the nineteenth century and the ceremonial equality of princes following the 1815 Congress of Vienna had rendered meetings between monarchs possible again, after centuries when such undertakings contained too many risks for both the life and the honour of sovereigns. Especially in the decade before the First World War such encounters abounded. By then, Paulmann explains, the concept of monarchy had significantly changed. For one, the personal tie between princely authority and polity had long been cut, which resulted in a better integration of the monarchy in the state. For another, the nation had come to absorb the monarchy, thus reducing the room for manoeuvre of princes and forcing them to become representatives, or rather symbols, of the nation rather than of their dynasty.¹⁴⁸⁵ However, in the new international political culture that established itself during and immediately after the war, nationally elected politicians had come to replace sovereigns as embodiments of their nations on the international diplomatic scene. Moreover, whereas pre-war travelling princes had no real authority to negotiate with each other, these politicians had. They also used this democratically legitimized authority at summit meetings, of which more than twenty were held between 1920 and 1922.¹⁴⁸⁶ Of course, encounters between sovereigns still occurred but they had a sizeably smaller diplomatic impact. Another reason for this was that there were simply less sovereigns in Europe. The most important ones, which included ardent travellers such as the German Kaiser and the Russian Tsar, no longer headed their respective empires.¹⁴⁸⁷

As for the Belgian King Albert, his dynasty had longer than most of its European counterparts managed to preserve its influence on foreign policy. Albert himself had always endeavoured to set himself up as a modern prince, and not only on the domestic scene. The King had proven to the audience at the Paris peace conference that he moved with the times by spectacularly arriving in the French capital by air. For a few days, Albert commanded headlines for being the only king to attend the conference and the first ever to arrive in Paris

¹⁴⁸⁵ PAULMANN, *Pomp und Politik*, Part I. See also CANNADINE, David, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: the British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', ca. 1820-1977", in Eric HOBSBAWM and Terence RANGER (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 2012 [1983], 101-164.

¹⁴⁸⁶ RIEMENS, *De passie voor vrede*, 155-162.

¹⁴⁸⁷ URBACH, "Diplomatic History", 991-992.

in a plane.¹⁴⁸⁸ Nevertheless, his experiences in Versailles had undoubtedly made him realize that at least in the sphere of international relations the day of kings was largely past.

In early 1918 inhabitants of the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island witnessed how Hymans, the second of the privateering politicians who had arrived on the island several years before, had taken control of the resort. After having familiarized himself with life on Diplomatic Island, he had struck an alliance with some of the Belgian resort's formerly junior inhabitants who had risen to power under his predecessor. While the Storm was still raging over the island and over the Mainland, they worked together and confronted the Ruler of the Belgian resort with the new division of power in which the latter possessed considerably less leverage to impose his views on how relations with the other resorts of the island should transpire. After the Storm had subsided, the Ruler gradually realized that his place was no longer on the island. Yet this does not mean that he lost interest in what was happening on there or that he never visited the island any more. Rather, he chose to focus on life in the Mainland, where his informal position of power was increased due to the prestige he had acquired defending the Mainland.

In the meantime, the trio composed of the two formerly junior islanders and the formerly privateering politician ruled over the Belgian resort and took charge of settling relations with representatives of the other resorts on Diplomatic Island. At stake were the material, and more specifically financial and geographical conditions under which the peoples living on Mainland would resume their lives after the Storm. For the trio, the geographical extension of the Belgian part of the Mainland predominated. They indeed believed that this was what the Belgian people wanted. While it is not entirely clear which parts of the ruling trio actually decided about the course to follow in these negotiations, it is certain that the formerly junior islanders at least initially succeeded in imposing their views about the Belgian Mainland's true interests.

As time went by, new sailing politicians arrived at the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island. These men had lived on the Mainland during the Storm and were governing it since the Storm had subsided. Before, they had never really taken an interest in life on Diplomatic Island. At first, the ruling trio managed to convince the majority of these men that the decisions they were taking on Diplomatic Island served the Belgian Mainland in the best possible way. As it seemed, however, the new arrivals gradually got to know the stakes of the

¹⁴⁸⁸ MARKS, *Innocent Abroad*, 119.

game on Diplomatic Island and developed their own ideas about where the interests of the Belgian Mainland truly lay.

This chapter has described how Orts and Bassompierre, the formerly junior inhabitants of the House on the Belgian resort, worked together with the politician Hymans to consolidate their influence over how relations with representatives of the other resorts should be conducted. In doing so, it has paid little attention to the remaining senior inhabitants of the House, but certainly enough to demonstrate that men like Fallon, Lejeune de Münsbach and even Ligne tried to temper the passions of the formerly junior inhabitants of the resort. Perhaps their moderate attitude could one day be the key to their survival.

CHAPTER 11. THE LIBERAL MONARCHY II: JOURNALISTS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS VS. DIPLOMATS AND DIPLOMACY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The previous chapter has mentioned that the open diplomacy propagated by Woodrow Wilson before and at the Paris peace conference did not live up to the expectations of many self-declared representatives of public opinion. According to one British journalist, especially the fact that Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau secretly consulted and decided about the most important issues amongst themselves, without involving leaders of minor powers nor informing the press about their proceedings, “had a bad effect upon the public.” The same journalist even stated that “no four kings or emperors could have conducted the Conference on more autocratic lines.”¹⁴⁸⁹ In the introduction to Part Two we have seen that traditional historiography somewhat provocatively claimed that in the Belgian case there had been no public opinion on the country’s foreign policy before the First World War. We have also seen that this idea came from publicists writing immediately after the war. These men denied the pre-war existence of such opinion to strengthen their argument that the war had deeply changed the public’s attitude towards diplomacy. Henceforth, they claimed, public opinion wished to be closely informed about the making and execution of Belgian foreign policy.¹⁴⁹⁰ Despite the attention devoted to these issues by contemporary publicists, historians have largely neglected the study of public opinion on Belgian diplomacy after the First World War. Only two accounts have been produced, and both of them draw on a random and very limited selection of newspaper articles to provide mere impressions of opinions that Belgian editors published about the country’s foreign policy.¹⁴⁹¹ In addition, no publications have as yet informed us about the representation of Belgian diplomats, or diplomats in general, in the newspapers published in the aftermath of the war. Surely, whether published opinions on these topics really reflected the attitude of large parts of the Belgian population is very difficult to determine and was also an issue for debate at the time.¹⁴⁹²

This chapter explores how Belgian parliamentarians and journalists evaluated the actions undertaken by their country’s diplomatic representatives before, during and in the year after the Paris peace conference. The first section of this chapter aims to shed light on how the

¹⁴⁸⁹ RIEMENS, *De passie voor vrede*, 120-123. The quote is on pp. 121.

¹⁴⁹⁰ See, in addition to the references in the introduction to Part Two, OPDEBEEK, G., “Nederland en België. Een vraagstuk van internationale draagkracht”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 2 August 1919.

¹⁴⁹¹ See DEVLEESHOUWER, “L’opinion publique”, 207-238; and DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 904-920.

¹⁴⁹² See especially my discussion in §2 of articles published in *La Nation belge*.

experience of war and peace had impacted their conceptions of Belgian diplomacy and of the country's diplomats. To put this story in the right perspective, it is important to stress that before the conference started hopes were high among journalists and parliamentarians that Belgian delegates would receive ample satisfaction, and that consequently feelings of disappointment about the conference's results ran rampant. It is also important to underline that considerable differences existed about the main source of this disappointment. While most parliamentarians and journalists agreed about the insufficiency of the reparations Belgium was to receive, a smaller but nevertheless loud number of them seemed to regret more that the government's territorial claims had not materialized. Nevertheless, debate in parliament remained rather calm. This was probably due to the spirit of the governments of national union which subsisted throughout Hymans's Foreign Ministership and possibly also because both the Socialists, the Liberals and the Catholics counted annexationists and anti-annexationists in their ranks and tried to conceal these differences.¹⁴⁹³

Given that Belgian parliamentary debate about the system of diplomatic practice also remained fairly limited throughout this period, the first section will primarily – although not exclusively – study opinions published in the country's largest press organs. By contrast, the debate in the Belgian press was significantly more animated, not the least because several MP's appealed to the editors of newspapers, who gladly accepted their opinion pieces about Belgian diplomacy and about the country's diplomats. These pieces competed for prominence with similar articles written by their own journalists.¹⁴⁹⁴ This no doubt added to the influence of newspapers' editors on the country's diplomacy.

The presence of the press as an important new actor certainly had consequences for the traditional executives of Belgian foreign policy. This will be illustrated not only at the end of the first section but also in the second section of this chapter, which investigates how the end

¹⁴⁹³ This applied especially to the discussions of the Treaty of Versailles in the Chamber, which took about two hours and concluded with the member unanimously ratifying the treaty. In addition to the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister, only four members took the word. Of these four, the old conservative Catholic party leader Charles Woeste was the only one to explicitly refer to the government's annexationist policy. He declared to have always opposed territorial expansion and politely suggested that the claims of the Belgian delegates in this field might have damaged the Belgian cause. The several annexationist parliamentarians present barely reacted. See PHK, 8 August 1919, 1453-1462. Belgian Senators, by contrast, discussed the treaty during several sessions and, as we will see in §2, uttered different opinions. The most remarkable intervention came from the Liberal Prosper Hanrez, who enunciated ideas which contrasted very sharply with Woeste's. Hanrez openly pleaded for Belgian annexation of both banks of the Scheldt and for the return of the people of Dutch Limburg "to their old love [Belgium], as is their wish." He even claimed that the population of Zeeland Flanders had a similar desire. Perhaps because he realized that none of his colleagues would actually still believe that, he quickly added that if the opposite were true, the often invoked respect for the will of the populations could surely not mean that "the vital interests of millions of Belgians were sacrificed to the profit of a few thousands of inhabitants of Zeeland Flanders." Nonetheless, Hanrez and the other annexationists chose to agree to the Versailles treaty, which also in the Senate was ratified by unanimous vote. See PHS, 20 August 1919, 601-602.

¹⁴⁹⁴ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 873-920.

of the First World War and its aftermath affected the Belgian diplomatic corps as a whole. More specifically, it looks into how Hymans and his collaborators reacted to the appeals made by the self-declared voices of the public concerning the organisation of the diplomatic career.

§ 1. Published Opinion on Belgian Diplomacy and Diplomats

The next pages are largely based on articles from a representative selection of Belgian newspapers. Three criteria have guided this selection: language of publication, political ideology, and circulation figures. In the Flemish-language press landscape of the years after the First World War, the largest players were the Catholic newspaper *Gazet van Antwerpen* and the Liberal daily *Het Laatste Nieuws*, which both generally sold over 75.000 copies a day. Other important players, whose circulation figures, however, probably amounted only to a third of this number, were the Catholic *De Standaard* and the Flemish-language press organ of the Socialist Party, *Vooruit*. The publishers of the French-language counterpart of *Vooruit*, namely *Le Peuple*, printed about 50.000 copies a day. Those of the Catholic *La Libre Belgique*, which during the war had been the most widely spread clandestine newspaper in occupied Belgium, probably printed a lot more, as did the publishers of the Liberal *La Dernière Heure*, whose daily circulation figures exceeded 140.000 copies. The analysis of the newspapers mentioned so far is grouped under the first two headings. All these newspapers had in common that they were partisan, meaning that they could clearly be linked to one of the three political parties which had struggled in the Belgian political arena since the late nineteenth century, without therefore necessarily representing all the views of that political party. The nationalist press, grouped under the third and fourth heading, explicitly claimed not to undergo the influence of any political party but to be ‘truly national’ instead. In addition to *La Nation belge*, which during the war had dominated the Belgian press landscape outside of the occupied country with circulation well above 100.000 copies, this opinion was represented by *Le Soir*, which not long after the war attained its pre-war position as the country’s most widespread newspaper, selling over 150.000 copies a day.¹⁴⁹⁵

The study of how Belgian journalists and publicists contributing to these newspapers evaluated the performances of their country’s diplomatic representatives in the framework of the new international political climate will serve as a useful leg up to an analysis of how the

¹⁴⁹⁵ DE BENS, *De pers*, 37, 373 and 383-384. On the concept of partisan press, see STALKER, Jordan, “Partisan Press”, in Wolfgang DONSBACH (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, Berkeley, 2008.

experience of the peace conference impacted their conceptions of Belgian diplomacy and diplomats in general.

The Flemish-Language Partisan Press on Belgian Diplomacy and Diplomats

This is not to say that all editors of Belgian newspapers published opinions about Belgian diplomats or closely followed the proceedings of the country's delegates at the peace conference. The 1919 editions of *Vooruit*, for instance, contained very few comments on these issues. The internationalist views of Flemish socialists seemed to focus primarily on the conduct of international relations in general. Especially issues related to the international system of diplomatic practice caught their attention. Pleas for an open diplomacy certainly appeared more often in the columns of the Flemish Socialist press than they did in other Flemish-language newspapers. The Belgian Socialist Party had indeed always counted among its members the oldest and fiercest advocates of the democratization of international relations. The articles of Flemish Socialist journalists mostly contained expressions of hope that the peace conference and the League of Nations which it was expected to create, would establish a truly open diplomacy.¹⁴⁹⁶

In some of the larger Flemish-language newspapers, denunciations of the methods of traditional diplomacy often went accompanied with condemnations of the concealed annexationist policy of the Belgian government. This was largely due to the fact that several of these newspapers were controlled by Flemish leaders who had spent the war in the Netherlands and had always opposed Belgian claims to Dutch territory. During the war two of them, the Catholic MP Frans Van Cauwelaert and the Liberal publicist Julius Hoste jr., had guided the daily *Vrij België* together. Less than a week after the armistice, Hoste was able to resume publication of *Het Laatste Nieuws*. A few weeks later, Van Cauwelaert and his associates published the first edition *De Standaard*.¹⁴⁹⁷

It soon became clear to readers of these newspapers that the union of foreign policy views which had existed between Hoste and Van Cauwelaert had survived the war. In addition to their shared aversion towards Belgian propaganda for the incorporation of Dutch

¹⁴⁹⁶ See ANONYMOUS, "Plechtige manifestatie ter ere van minister Anseele", *Vooruit*, 10 December 1918; F.H., "De Vredeszonne rijst", *Vooruit*, 19 February 1919. When it became clear that these hopes would not materialize, disappointment was great. See for instance ANONYMOUS, "Het 1 Mei Manifest der Socialistische Internationale", *Vooruit*, 14 April 1919; ANONYMOUS, "Weg met de geheime diplomatie. De oorlogsonthullingen gaan hun gang", *Vooruit*, 10 October 1919; ARDUIN, Jan, "Internationale Reactie", *Vooruit*, 3 November 1919.

¹⁴⁹⁷ DE BENS, *De pers*, 241-242 and 309-310. De Bens provides circulation figures of Belgian newspapers in the years after the First World War on p. 37.

Limburg and Zeeland Flanders, both men found common ground in their staunch support of Wilson and of his ideas about the conduct of international relations. While many Belgian journalists, from not long after the start of the Paris peace conference onwards, lost their faith in the American president and in his promises of an open and democratic diplomacy, Hoste and Van Cauwelaert ranked among the last to keep defending them.¹⁴⁹⁸ Three months into the conference Van Cauwelaert had an article published which ended with the exclamation “Down with secret diplomacy and long live Wilson!”¹⁴⁹⁹ Almost a month later readers of *Het Laatste Nieuws* could still witness the editor of their paper conveying a similar message. Hoste argued that while Wilson had perhaps compromised on temporary and secondary issues, he had firmly maintained his leading thoughts of collective security, disarmament, and arbitration. Hoste also held out the perspective of “the immense joy to be allowed to participate in a new world organization,” the League of Nations, which “should promote both the safety of all small states and the unrestricted development of all small peoples.”¹⁵⁰⁰

In this article, Hoste implicitly criticized the desires of Belgian nationalists by arguing that both the country’s security and the nation’s growth did not necessitate annexations but could be satisfied in the framework of the League. In many other articles published in this period, the editor of *Het Laatste Nieuws* explicitly connected his aversion towards “any secret diplomatic fussing” with the anti-Dutch attitudes of the government and the Foreign Ministry. He repeatedly expressed his worries that “old diplomatic practices” such as the secrecy of the Belgian delegates in Paris, especially in their relations with the press, and the reluctance of the Belgian government to clearly formulate its war aims caused “mistrust and misunderstanding between two small states in whose greatest interest it is to live in the best of understandings.”¹⁵⁰¹ Hoste’s frustration seemingly reached its high in late August 1919. At that time, he published a long editorial in dialogue format, entitled “The Dangers of Secret Diplomacy”. Apparently, a “very educated Fleming” had come to see him to inquire about the negotiations in the Commission of Fourteen, which had to revise the Treaties of 1839 with

¹⁴⁹⁸ Most of their fellow journalists had vented their disappointment a lot earlier, and would continue to do so afterwards. See ANONYMOUS, “De Vredeskonferencie te Parijs ... Eene groote waarheid”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 26 April 1919; ANONYMOUS, “De Vredeskonferencie te Parijs ... De Raad der Vijf”, *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 4 July 1919; DE WITTE, P., “Het Vredescongres”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 5 May 1919.

¹⁴⁹⁹ ANONYMOUS, “Openbaarheid in de diplomatie is waarborg van recht en vrede”, *De Standaard*, 14 April 1919.

¹⁵⁰⁰ H[OSTE], Julius, “Het vredetraktaat. De vooruitzichten”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 11 May 1919. At the very latest by the end of 1919, however, also Hoste realized that the visions of an open diplomacy had not materialized. See ANONYMOUS, “Kerstdag te Brussel”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 26 December 1919.

¹⁵⁰¹ ANONYMOUS, “Nederland en België”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 20 December 1918; HOSTE, Julius, “Onder de hoede van Wilson. Het belang der kleine staaten”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 1 March 1919; ANONYMOUS, “De herziening van het traktaat van 1839. De besprekingen te Parijs”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 8 augustus 1919.

regards to the relations between Belgium and the Netherlands. Hoste's reply that he knew nothing about it gave rise to the following conversation:

“- But what does all that troublemaking mean; what do Segers and Orts ask in Paris?

- It is possible that they themselves know, but I do not.

- Do they ask annexations? Are Segers and Orts after Dutch territory?

- That seems unlikely to me.

- But did you not also receive confidential notes?

- Certainly, but I do not read them, because I know by experience that they are drafted in a diplomat's language that no one understands.

- So we are drifting in full secret diplomacy.

- Those are your words. We read that the situation is ... 'threatening', and we do not even know why! There were two possible ways of negotiating with the Netherlands: trust or distrust, clearly determined wishes or ambiguous claims; moderation or recklessness. Apparently, they have chosen: distrust, ambiguous claims, and recklessness. And now everything is a mess.”

After further discussions had become more technical, the “very educated Fleming” observed that Hoste expressed himself “like a diplomat”, upon which the editor exclaimed: “No insults if I may ask!” He then explained that the difference between a diplomat and an ordinary mortal like himself was that “the diplomat messes everything up because he considers things with antiquated concepts,” whereas “the ordinary mortal unconsciously uses new concepts, as a result of which everything straightens out.”¹⁵⁰²

The editor of *Het Laatste Nieuws* suggested that international relations should be conducted under the watchful eyes of the peoples, and more specifically of journalists as their representatives. Their scrutiny, Hoste implicitly argued, would continuously correct the deviations that diplomats would inevitably slip into. Similar messages appeared in the columns of *De Standaard*. “Let the people know what is demanded, negotiated and decided in their name,” one of Van Cauwelaert's journalists wrote, explaining that “the spirit of the peoples is the true spirit in which peace should be realized” and “mutual trust” could be achieved.¹⁵⁰³ Like Hoste in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, this journalist subtly denounced not only the Belgian delegates' secretive diplomatic practices but also their concealed claims to Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders. However, contrary to Hoste, who might have felt some loyalty towards his fellow Liberal Party member Hymans, Van Cauwelaert and his colleagues

¹⁵⁰² HOSTE, Julius, “De gevaren der geheime diplomatie. Misverstanden en verwijdering”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 28 August 1919.

¹⁵⁰³ ANONYMOUS, “Openbaarheid in de diplomatie is waarborg van recht en vrede”, *De Standaard*, 14 April 1919.

used their newspaper to directly attack the Foreign Minister on these issues. The June 1919 resolution which opposed changes of the Belgian-Dutch border was warmly welcomed in the columns of *De Standaard*, where Van Cauwelaert and his journalists took malicious pleasure in what they labelled as Hymans's grave personal defeat.¹⁵⁰⁴ After the contents of the peace treaty had been rendered public, one of his collaborators even openly accused Hymans of diplomatic incompetence, arguing that the Foreign Minister would not have pursued an annexationist policy if only he would have known just a little about world politics.¹⁵⁰⁵

Four months earlier, in the wake of the audience granted to Hymans by the Big Four, Van Cauwelaert had already taken steps in the Chamber to interpellate him about his true intentions vis-à-vis the Netherlands. It had taken a threatening letter from Segers to prevent Van Cauwelaert from doing so.¹⁵⁰⁶ Nevertheless, he kept venting his displeasure with the Belgian annexationist policy in *De Standaard*. Van Cauwelaert not only directed his criticisms against Belgian delegates at the peace conference, but also towards the annexationist publicists. "If tomorrow the relations between Belgium and the Netherlands and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg are not how they should be," Van Cauwelaert wrote just days after Hymans's audience, "it will largely be due to the secret diplomacy of our Foreign Office and [...] to the clumsy press diplomats who feel the urge to publicly fight over the diplomatic inheritance of Banning."¹⁵⁰⁷ Van Cauwelaert launched these attacks to the nationalist publicists after several vain efforts to dissuade them by means of private letters from pursuing their propaganda campaigns in and about Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders.¹⁵⁰⁸ Given that this published attack was followed by many others, in which Van Cauwelaert and his journalists denounced the "greed for territory" of the men he had so often polemicized with during the war, reactions from Fernand Neuray and his collaborators did not fail to occur. They often led to polemics during which journalists of *De Standaard* and *La Nation belge* blamed each other for the disillusion, in matters of reparations and annexations respectively, caused by the Versailles treaty. Discussions culminated in the Spring of 1920, when the Belgian-Dutch negotiations had reached a dead end. A journalist of *De Standaard* reacted against a piece from *La Nation belge* in which the French government was blamed for

¹⁵⁰⁴ ANONYMOUS, "Nederlandsch-Belgisch vraagstuk. De nederlaag van minister Hymans, *De Standaard*, 11 June 1918; VAN CAUWELAERT, Frans, "Laat Holland en België grootmoedig de handen in elkaar slaan", *De Standaard*, 5 July 1919.

¹⁵⁰⁵ ANONYMOUS, "Over de oorzaak van onze diplomatieke tegenslagen", *De Standaard*, 27 July 1919.

¹⁵⁰⁶ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 879-880.

¹⁵⁰⁷ VAN CAUWELAERT, Frans, "De eischen van België op de vredesconferentie", *De Standaard*, 14 February 1919. See also VAN CAUWELAERT, Frans, "Onze diplomatieke vertegenwoordiging op het vredescongres", *De Standaard*, 21 January 1919.

¹⁵⁰⁸ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 879.

not having lent Belgium enough support in this matter. The blame was entirely on ourselves, the journalist of *De Standaard* opposed, noting ironically that “both the language of our diplomats and the language of our press has managed to put our national dignity in the most beautiful of daylights.” This implicit criticism of procedures adopted by members of the nationalist press did not go unnoticed. The very next day, a colleague from *La Nation belge* translated the above quote and commented: “One would believe that these lines have been inspired by the view of the deplorable effects which the so resolutely belgophobe attitude of M. Van Cauwelaert’s newspaper have produced on the Belgian-Dutch negotiations.” The fact that “the pro-German organ”, as he labelled *De Standaard*, drew this conclusion against *La Nation belge*, the journalist concluded, must be attributed to both “ignorance and bad faith.”¹⁵⁰⁹

Less than a week later, a collaborator of *Het Laatste Nieuws* contributed to the discussion with a satirical piece. Under the pseudonym A. Rannah, the writer Johan De Maegt told the story of the ordinary but sharp lad Klaas Kloefers who together with his slightly slower friend Dries Gaepmule happened to end up in a train, amidst a group of travelling journalists. According to the writer, these journalists acted as if they were in a meeting of what he mockingly labelled as the “parti nachonal”, a reference to the *Comité de Politique Nationale* of which most journalists of *La Nation belge* were members.¹⁵¹⁰ Apparently, Klaas immediately took a dislike in the leader of these travellers: “Suermondts [Sourmouth], the terrible baldy of Louvain, who had just taken pride that he no longer understood Flemish, rose. Leaning terribly on his umbrella, he said: In the name of those of Brussels I declare that ... I am also from Brussels, Klaas interfered. You did not say in advance that you would take the word on our behalf... I declare, Suermondts proceeded with a scathing look in his eyes, that the Dutchman is an ugly Keeskop [cheese-head]. And our diplomats are ugly no-goods, Germanophiles in disguise. Because Boche and Keeskop, it’s all the same. We have to send the army at them. I am leaning here on... But the train slightly jolted and Suermondts’s umbrella broke... You are leaning on a poor umbrella! Klaas said... Shut up, Suermondts shouted, and beware! You do not know who I am!... Pooh, Klaas said, you are the owner of a

¹⁵⁰⁹ ANONYMOUS, “Waardigheid tegenover het buitenland”, *De Standaard*, 9 April 1920; ANONYMOUS, “Echos. Ignorance et mauvaise foi”, *La Nation belge*, 10 April 1920. See also ANONYMOUS, “Over de oorzaak van onze diplomatieke tegenslagen”, *De Standaard*, 27 July 1919; and BERNARD, Charles, “L’atout d’Hollande”, *La Nation belge*, 7 September 1919.

¹⁵¹⁰ See DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 1551-1552.

broken umbrella... Laughter... Are that Bolsheviks? Dries Gaepmule asked... Hat off, Dries, Klaas said, it's the 'real' patriots."¹⁵¹¹

In this story, De Maegt claimed to adopt the perspective of the common Flemish people to criticize Belgian nationalist journalists for speaking in the name of the entire Belgian nation without taking into account large sections of public opinion with which they had clearly lost touch. The author put Suermondts up as a Fleming who was proud to have obtained social mobility and entered the Francophone elite. Klaas, by contrast, was represented as truly originating from the (Flemish) people. He apparently spoke both French and Flemish and immediately made clear to the nationalist journalist that the latter was speaking for himself rather than for all the people of Brussels. Implicitly, Klaas also argued that despite his humble appearance he was able to participate in the political debate. Suermondts, however, did not acknowledge this capacity of his fellow traveller while he actually should have treated him as equal. After all, they were sharing the same railway carriage. The theme of the train could be linked with democratization and modernity.¹⁵¹² Given that a little jolt of the train sufficed to cause his fall, Suermondts had clearly not adapted to these modern and democratic times.

Also contributors to the more popular Catholic newspaper *Gazet van Antwerpen* shared the opinions of *De Standaard's* journalists about the attitudes towards the Netherlands of both the Belgian delegates in Versailles and the country's annexationist press. One of them found Hymans's decision to break off negotiations with the Netherlands hard to accept. "Our setbacks, not to say our defeats in the field of our diplomacy and foreign policy," he argued, "are now too well-known to still try to conceal them." Particularly towards the Netherlands, this journalist explained, Hymans had "acted very clumsily" by opposing the establishment of the seat of the League of Nations in The Hague. At any rate, he concluded, "it is necessary that there will be clarity and that we are clearly told what the policy of our diplomats and our Foreign Minister has been."¹⁵¹³ Another collaborator of *Gazet van Antwerpen* was more direct. He argued that "all thoughts of annexations or imperialism do not belong in our times" and that the "many humiliations" Belgium had suffered in its foreign policy were due to "a too great concern for its borders." According to this journalist, "acting on the approval of a

¹⁵¹¹ RANNAH, A. [pseudonym of Johan De Maegt], "In het verloren hoeksken", *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 16 April 1920.

¹⁵¹² See for instance BEAUMONT, Matthew, and Michael FREEMAN (eds.), *The Railway and Modernity. Time, Space, and the Machine Ensemble*, Oxford, 2007; and FRASER, Benjamin F., and Steven D. Spalding (eds.), *Trains, Culture, and Mobility: Riding the Rails*, Lanham, 2012.

¹⁵¹³ VIDI, "Brief uit Brussel. Onze buitenlandse politiek en Minister Hymans", *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 31 May and 1 June 1920.

few higher classes and an exaggerated nationalist press, certain Belgian diplomats have overemphasized selfish feelings of chauvinism.” He claimed that “the people, with its democratic spirit,” had always disapproved of “the foreign policy of Belgian nationalists” in its press.¹⁵¹⁴

It should be noted that, contrary to journalists of *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *De Standaard*, before 1920 those of *Gazet van Antwerpen* did not really oppose Belgian annexationist demands at the Paris peace conference and in commissions afterwards.¹⁵¹⁵ All this changed after Christmas 1919, when the nationalist press had attacked the Pope for appealing to Catholics all over the world to help starving children in Germany and Austria. The editor honoured *Gazet van Antwerpen*’s reputation as a very Catholic newspaper by fiercely criticizing “our brave chauvinists”, who “go to battle against little children.” Implicitly referring to the pre-war pro-German sympathies of *La Nation belge*’s Fernand Neuray and *Le Soir*’s Edmond Patris, he described them as “the noise-makers who before the war crept and crawled at the feet of the German colony” but afterwards left for “the safe abroad”, where they “eliminated with their words or their pens more Boches than our boys at the Yser could get within range.” After the war, the editor of *Gazet van Antwerpen* continued, these publicists “came to teach lessons in patriotism to everyone, even to those who out of patriotism had been starving.” According to the editor, the same publicists had “impeded the work of our diplomats and aroused the distrust of the Allied Powers by their stupid foolishness and suspicious, annexationist fairground music.” These “chauvinists”, he concluded, “exploited the concept of patriotism like any huckster does his stall.”¹⁵¹⁶

Evaluating the above articles from Belgium’s major Flemish-language newspapers, it is safe to state that their editors all advocated what could be labelled as the democratization of international politics. They seemed to urge for a diplomacy which was more representative of what the population wanted. In general, this involved the conduct of international relations under the scrutiny of the public. Specifically for the Belgian case, this meant a policy which opposed annexations of Dutch territory (apart from a few mentions in *De Standaard*, explicit references to Luxembourg are notoriously absent in the Flemish-language press). To put it in Arno Mayer’s terms, the journalists of the major Flemish-language newspapers identified

¹⁵¹⁴ JORIS, J., “Naar de rechtzinnige democratie”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 24 September 1920.

¹⁵¹⁵ See for instance ANONYMOUS, “Geduld uitoefenen”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 27 January 1919; ANONYMOUS, “Laatste berichten. Wat België van de vredesconferentie verlangt”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 14 February 1919.

¹⁵¹⁶ ANONYMOUS, “Onze dappere patriotards trekken te velde tegen kleine kinderen”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 1 January 1920.

themselves as the forces of movement and associated the persons who executed Belgium's international relations with the forces of order.

But what does this mean for their conceptions of Belgian 'diplomats'? First of all, the articles published in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *De Standaard*, and *Gazet van Antwerpen* illustrate that who their authors called 'diplomats' were not necessarily members of the Belgian diplomatic corps. The editor of *Het Laatste Nieuws* associated the practices of traditional diplomacy with Orts, who was a career diplomat but also with Segers and with the Belgian delegates at the Paris peace conference, who were not. The actions of this group composed largely of politicians nevertheless determined Hoste's perception of what diplomats were, namely persons who messed everything up because they practised their activities in secret and lacked the common sense and, arguably, the inherent pacifism of ordinary people. While the editors of *Gazet van Antwerpen* were often at loggerheads with Hoste on issues of domestic politics, several of their journalists fully agreed with his conceptions of Belgian 'diplomats' and with what he reproached these politicians.¹⁵¹⁷ So did Van Cauwelaert and his collaborators at *De Standaard*. They also claimed to know that these politician-diplomats combined secretive diplomatic ways with an offensive language that they shared with 'press diplomats', a term which could well refer to the close ties of these nationalist journalists and publicists with the Foreign Ministry.

Much more than before the war, Belgian journalists labelled as diplomats all (Belgian and international) persons who executed the foreign policy of their respective countries.¹⁵¹⁸ Because after the war politicians tended to conduct diplomacy in the limelight, the term diplomats in newspaper articles referred in much fewer cases to members of the diplomatic corps. However, it should be mentioned that the few times that these career diplomats figured in the columns of Flemish-language newspapers, they received a better press than their political counterparts. The journalist of *Gazet van Antwerpen* who sarcastically commented on Belgium's 'brave chauvinists' described the country's traditional diplomats as men whose arguably valuable work was impeded by the propaganda of nationalist publicists. In much the same way, Johan De Maegt, the literary contributor to *Het Laatste Nieuws*, represented 'our diplomats' in his story as the enemies of the antagonist Suermondt. Since this nationalist journalist was at his turn the enemy of the hero Klaas, the Belgian diplomats that De Maegt wrote about appear as unjustly vilified persons. In the late July 1919 editorial in which he accused Hymans of diplomatic incompetence, a journalist of *De Standaard* resorted to a

¹⁵¹⁷ DE BENS, *De pers in België*, 287.

¹⁵¹⁸ See also ANONYMOUS, "Een staatsman aan het woord", *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 20 March 1920.

similar reasoning but also named the most important of these victimized diplomats. “The misters of the French press from Brussels,” he wrote, argued that “Belgium” had suffered diplomatic defeats in Versailles because, among other reasons, “Beyens in his time had declared towards Holland that our government had nothing in common with the annexationist propaganda of certain Belgian press circles.” These “vain troublemakers” were completely wrong, the journalist of *De Standaard* opposed, claiming that results at the peace conference would have been much better if “our Foreign Ministry” had stuck to “the example and the program of Beyens.”¹⁵¹⁹

This expression of sympathy for Baron Beyens sprung from the friendship which Van Cauwelaert, the political editor of *De Standaard*, had developed for the senior diplomat who had fallen into disgrace partly because of the machinations of Belgian nationalist politicians and journalists. Arguably, the actions of Beyens as Foreign Minister had positively influenced the image that editors and journalists of the largest Flemish-language newspapers had of ‘old school’ Belgian diplomats, who like them opposed annexations at the expense of the Netherlands and, more generally, a nationalist foreign policy.

The French-language Partisan Press on Belgian Diplomacy and Diplomats

Before looking at the other end of the wide rift which seemed to exist between journalists and editors of Flemish-language newspapers on the one hand, and Belgian nationalist publicists and journalists on the other hand, it is important to chart the landscape lying between these extremes. In addition to regional and smaller national newspapers, these were the Socialist Party’s French-language press organ *Le Peuple*, the Catholic daily *La Libre Belgique* and the Liberal newspaper *La Dernière Heure*.

In the immediate afterwar period, the editors of *Le Peuple* had to find a way to deal with the fact that opposite foreign policy views existed among prominent French-speaking Socialists. While the official Socialist Party line, reconfirmed at meetings held on Christmas and Boxing Day 1918, was one of ‘no annexations’, a small group of Socialists continued to express themselves as supporters of Belgian territorial expansion and were often seen taking part in the manifestations of the *Comité de Politique Nationale*.¹⁵²⁰

The existence of opposite foreign policy views among French-speaking Belgian Socialists became very apparent during the discussions of the Versailles treaty in the Senate.

¹⁵¹⁹ ANONYMOUS, “Over de oorzaak van onze diplomatieke tegenslagen”, *De Standaard*, 27 July 1919.

¹⁵²⁰ See DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 883-898.

On the one hand, Belgian senators witnessed the Internationalist Socialists Henri La Fontaine and Jules Lekeu plead for a truly open and pacifist diplomacy which, they were confident, would materialize in the League of Nations. On the other hand, they saw La Fontaine's fellow party member Léon Colleaux labelling the Internationalists' intervention as "discourses of impenitent pacifists who even after the terrible catastrophe that we endured are still full of illusions." Colleaux himself believed that the Belgian government should strengthen the country's military defence and suggested that it should therefore work towards obtaining natural borders for the country.¹⁵²¹ Aware of these differences, the editors of *Le Peuple* seem to have tried to avoid internal polemics and therefore focused on what Belgian Socialists had in common, namely an aversion towards traditional diplomatic practices.¹⁵²² Nevertheless, they also allowed dissident Socialists, the most important of whom were Jules Destrée and Louis Piérard, to take their place in the limelight. However, they did seem to have taken care that reports of the parliamentary interventions of for instance Destrée and opinion pieces delivered by him did not contain openly annexationist discourses and focused instead on indictments of secretive diplomatic practices.¹⁵²³ Destrée's charges in *Le Peuple* were not only directed against the Big Four but also against Hymans, who did not seem to realize that his "diplomatic reserve... hurt the new spirit of the peoples which condemns the diplomacy behind padded doors." The journalist of *Le Peuple* approvingly described how Destrée not only repeated the "socialist thesis" that "peoples have the right to be consulted about their fate" but also went further than that by arguing that this required "the complete accord between the mandatories of the Belgian nation and those that represent it in Paris."¹⁵²⁴

De Waele claims that the editors of *La Libre Belgique* had initially shared the annexationist aspirations of their colleagues of *Le Soir* and *La Nation belge*, but had soon revised their opinion. In late December 1918, De Waele tells us, the editors of *La Libre Belgique* had published a letter from Paul Fredericq, the rector of the University of Ghent. Fredericq sarcastically remarked that he had noticed many people who had clearly suffered so

¹⁵²¹ PHS, 19 August 1919, 566-570; 26 August 1919, 614-616.

¹⁵²² See for instance ANONYMOUS, "La diplomatie socialiste", *Le Peuple*, 28 November 1918; ANONYMOUS, "La diplomatie ouverte", *Le Peuple*, 3 December 1918; ANONYMOUS, "La Délégation Socialiste française chez le Président Wilson. L'Adresse de la Confédération Générale du Travail et du Parti", *Le Peuple*, 20 December 1918; F[ISCHER], F[rans], "Vers la paix. Les dessous de notre Conférence", *Le Peuple*, 11 February 1919; F[ISCHER], F[rans], "Comment se prépare la paix", *Le Peuple*, 10 April 1919; DE BROUCKERE, Louis, "La voix de la paix", *Le Peuple*, 10 April 1919; F[ISCHER], F[rans], "A la Conférence de la Paix. La veille du Dénouement", *Le Peuple*, 8 May 1919; DE BROUCKERE, Louis, "Diplomatie secrète", *Le Peuple*, 13 June 1919.

¹⁵²³ See for instance DESTREE, Jules, "La Belgique et le Grand Duché de Luxembourg", *Le Peuple*, 11 March 1919; and ANONYMOUS, "In de Kamer", *Vooruit*, 13 June 1919.

¹⁵²⁴ ANONYMOUS, "La question hollando-belge", *Le Peuple*, 12 June 1919.

much during the war that they had become “nervous, unreasonable, irritable amidst their joy.” He explained that this “neurosis” had led “some hotheads into delusions of grandeur: Zeeland, Limburg, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg etc...” Addressing the readers of *La Libre Belgique*, Fredericq insisted that not the least importance should be attached to this folly and stressed that Belgium owed so very much to the Netherlands for giving shelter and aid to many Belgian refugees. “The mules who would forget that,” he concluded, “deserve a beating.”¹⁵²⁵

It seems, however, that De Waele has limited her study of *La Libre Belgique* to this quote, which is also to be found in Devleeshouwer’s work on Belgian public opinion in the immediate afterwar. Later editions of the Catholic daily reveal that its editors did certainly not oppose Belgian territorial expansion, even if it meant that the Dutch would have to give up part of their territory. This becomes clear from an editorial published in March 1919, which also contains interesting comments on the system of diplomatic practice in Versailles. The editors of *La Libre Belgique* did distinguish themselves from their colleagues of the nationalist press in terms of the argumentation they used to justify Belgian annexationism. They claimed that the Big Three in Versailles would never accept as decisive neither the argument of historical ties between Belgium and the targeted territories nor the one of the injustices the country had endured in 1839 when the Great Powers assigned Zeeland Flanders, Dutch Limburg and part of Luxembourg to the Netherlands. Historical arguments, they explained, are “most narrowly and selfishly nationalist” because they claim “to suppress all current contingencies” and have “something insolent and absolute about them, which only reckons with one people.” As such, the editors continued, “the argument of historical rights is essentially the exact opposite of the principle of the self-determination of peoples, proclaimed by Wilson.” After pointing out that the Belgian government needed the support of the American President to obtain its goals, they insisted that its delegation to the peace conference would employ military and economic arguments instead. The editors of *La Libre Belgique* were indeed convinced that Wilson would never let “the wishes of a city [Maastricht?] or of a tiny province [Zeeland Flanders?] prevail over the security of Europe.” Given that European security required Belgian possession of Maastricht and of Zeeland Flanders, they argued, Wilson and the other members of the Big Four would surely understand that the Netherlands needed to abandon their sovereignty over these territories. After invoking, in a very contradictory manner, historical arguments to justify a political and economic union between Belgium and Luxembourg, the editors concluded that “our cause is good” but that “we should

¹⁵²⁵ Paul Fredericq quoted in DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 904.

use the right arguments to defend it.” This meant, they added, “no more large multicolour posters on which blood-coloured stains mark the territories taken from Belgium in earlier times.” The initiatives of the *Comité de Politique Nationale*, they believed, would certainly not facilitate “the so delicate task of our diplomats.”¹⁵²⁶

The editors of *La Libre Belgique* clearly believed that Wilson did not consider his Fourteen Points, which were pervaded by the idea of self-determination, as the commandments of New Diplomacy. Perhaps they were led to believe so because Wilson had by then often allowed the violation of the first of these Points, which stated that “diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.” Nevertheless, they felt that Belgian diplomats, whom they identified throughout Hymans’s Foreign Ministership as those representing the country in Versailles, should at least try to bring their rhetoric in accordance with the rhetoric adopted by the American President. In an editorial published one year later, buyers of *La Libre Belgique* could read that Belgian diplomats had failed to do so.¹⁵²⁷

In the months that followed *La Dernière Heure*’s reappearance in late November 1918, the editors devoted little or no attention to the issue of secret diplomacy. Instead, they limited themselves to publishing fairly disengaged descriptions of the preparations, proceedings and atmosphere of the peace conference.¹⁵²⁸ Robert Devleeshouwer shows that journalists of *La Dernière Heure* had initially supported the claims of Belgian annexationists and had even advised the Dutch government to incite the populations of Zeeland Flanders and Dutch Limburg to accept them. By April 1919, however, they had come to regard the “boisterous nationalism” associated with these demands as an electoral manoeuvre of the Catholic Party. As a result, they distanced themselves from them, or so Devleeshouwer argues.¹⁵²⁹ The associations they made probably sprung from their knowledge of the ties between on the one hand leading Catholic politicians such as Renkin and Carton de Wiart and on the other hand the *Comité de Politique nationale* and its leader Nothomb, who was also known to be politically Catholic.¹⁵³⁰ After the Belgian-Dutch negotiations had arrived at an impasse in the late Summer of 1919, a journalist of *La Dernière Heure* reflected on several

¹⁵²⁶ ANONYMOUS, “Les revendications de la Belgique. L’argument des droits historiques. – Un peu de mesure”, *La Libre Belgique*, 9 March 1919.

¹⁵²⁷ PASSELECQ, Fernand, “La question des bouches de l’Escaut”, *La Libre Belgique*, 20 March 1920.

¹⁵²⁸ See for instance ALCESTE, “Il y a cent ans”, *La Dernière Heure*, 26 December 1918; DE WALEFFE, Maurice, “Les petits inconvénients des grandes capitales”, *La Dernière Heure*, 12 January 1919; GILLE, Valère, “Les congrès et les diplomates”, *La Dernière Heure*, 16 March 1919; DE WALEFFE, Maurice, “Les coulisses du congrès de la paix”, *La Dernière Heure*, 17 March 1919.

¹⁵²⁹ DEVLEESHOUWER, “L’opinion publique”, 219-220.

¹⁵³⁰ GERARD, Emmanuel, “De democratie gedroomd, begrensd en ondermijnd, 1918-1939”, in DUMOULIN, *Nieuwe Geschiedenis van België, deel II*, 905.

elements which had contributed to the situation. Referring to the close connections between members of the *Comité de Politique Nationale* and the Foreign Ministry's leadership, he named as one these elements "the imprudent machinations of collaborators who were more zealous than intelligent." The journalist then made an interesting comparison between Belgian pre-war and post-war diplomats. Before the war, he stated, "the reports of some of our diplomats used to reflect their personal preferences and their reactionary tendencies rather than a clear comprehension of the country's interests." The journalist was glad to note that "the spirit" had changed during the war. However, he regretted, it seemed "that some elements are guided by nationalist attitudes, sometimes boisterous and other times dissimulated but never corresponding with the sentiments of the country."¹⁵³¹

As this article suggests, the editors and journalists of *La Dernière Heure* did not think very highly of Belgian diplomats. Their image of the country's pre-war diplomats had most likely been shaped at least partly by the German publication in 1915 of the reports of Belgian diplomats in Paris, London, and Berlin. The references to the "personal preferences" and "reactionary tendencies" could indeed be linked to revelations in these reports of how several heads of legation mistrusted and even felt some aversion towards the 'democratic' French Republican government, which most representatives of the Belgian Liberal press sympathized with. At the same time, the reports also suggested that Belgian top diplomats, until not very long before the war, felt some admiration for the more conservative German imperial monarchy. The reference to the alleged absence in many Belgian diplomats of a clear understanding of Belgian interests, however, builds further on pre-war conceptions of the country's diplomatic corps. As we have seen, before the Summer of 1914 journalists of *La Dernière Heure* agreed with most of their colleagues that the country's diplomatic representatives were incompetent and out of touch with Belgium's real needs.

As the above article also suggests, the editors and journalists of *La Dernière Heure* were not too fond of the new generation of Belgian diplomats either. Yet they did not ascribe these sentiments to the diplomats' presumed incompetence or lack of zest but rather to what they saw as their undiplomatic and undemocratic behaviour: undiplomatic in the sense that the noisy and nationalist actions of these diplomats harmed rather than promoted Belgium's foreign affairs, undemocratic because they executed a policy which did not carry the support

¹⁵³¹ ANONYMOUS, "L'incident hollando-belge", *La Dernière Heure*, 21 August 1919. See also ANONYMOUS, "Diplomates décorés", *La Dernière Heure*, 19 July 1919; and ANONYMOUS, "Le palais mondial sera inauguré aujourd'hui dimanche à Bruxelles", *La Dernière Heure*, 5 September 1920.

of the people they were supposed to represent. Most likely, however, what they labelled as diplomats comprised a larger group than the mere members of the Belgian diplomatic corps.

The Nationalist Press on Belgian Diplomacy

As Maria De Waele has shown, the Belgian press landscape of the immediate afterwar counted three sizeable explicitly annexationist newspapers. In addition to *La Nation belge*, these were the smaller, Antwerp-based *La Métropole*, which Jules Claes renamed in early March 1919 as *L'Action nationale* in order to better cover the message he wished to convey, and thirdly *Le Soir*. After the armistice Edmond Patris had regained control over the political section of this daily, which quickly regained its position as the country's most widely read newspaper. Until the Summer of 1919, journalists of these three media showered their readers with annexationist propaganda. In their articles, they primarily invoked what they labelled as 'historical' ties between Belgium and the lands across the border where – so they claimed – other Belgians lived who aspired to return to their Mother Country. After the Summer of 1919, the editors of *Le Soir* moderated their tone and limited their interventions to sporadic reformulations of Belgian territorial claims. Journalists of *La Nation belge* and *L'Action nationale*, by contrast, continued to try to mobilize their readers with the same zest.¹⁵³² This section will illustrate how, in the cases of *La Nation belge* and *Le Soir*, the views of their contributors on Belgian war aims tied in with how they saw Belgian diplomacy and the country's diplomats in the framework of the new international political culture.

Contrary to the editors of *De Standaard* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*, most nationalist journalists and publicists never really attached much faith to the ideas of Wilson about the conduct of international relations. As such, the first signs that the open character of the New Diplomacy was actually an illusion, were greeted by some of them with irony rather than with expressions of frustration.¹⁵³³ Much like Pierre Orts, *La Nation belge*'s peace conference correspondent Louis Dumont-Wilden was more irritated by the large retinues of the different national delegations. In his opinion, these were composed of all kinds of specialists, secretaries, interpreters, journalists, financiers, and other "amateur diplomats". Added to "the innumerable rubbernecks and snobs, habitués of Parisian upper circles, American soldiers

¹⁵³² See DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 904-920. Notwithstanding a few interesting additions, De Waele primarily summarizes the work of Robert Devleeshouwer and Robert Demoulin. See DEVLEESHOUWER, "L'opinion publique," 215-225; and DEMOULIN, Robert, "La presse liégeoise et le grand duché de Luxembourg après la première guerre mondiale," in POIDEVIN Raymond, and Gilbert TRAUSSCH (eds.), *Les relations franco-luxembourgeoise de Louis XIV à Robert Schuman*, Metz, 1978, 215-226.

¹⁵³³ See for instance PERCY, "La Conférence de la paix est ouverte. La paix qui s'annonce", *La Nation belge*, 19 January 1919; and SERIEUX, William, "La semaine parisienne", *La Nation belge*, 18 February 1919.

who played ball on the Champs-Élysées, and ladies or half-ladies who believed they would find a husband or a protector amidst this crowd of diplomats and financiers,” it seemed to Dumont-Wilden as if the “new diplomacy” risked to become no more than “a wretched caricature of the diplomacy of earlier times.” The journalist felt that in this way it would take a long time before the conference would have finished its proceedings.¹⁵³⁴

Perhaps Dumont-Wilden feared that these circumstances would impede what he believed would have to be the Belgian delegation’s main objective in Versailles, namely the country’s free disposition of the Scheldt. As he had stated about a month before the conference started, Dumont-Wilden believed that Belgium’s representatives in Versailles should “demand from Holland that it gives us back the keys of our house.” Although he did not explicitly state that this entailed incorporating Zeeland Flanders into the Belgian state, he insisted that the country’s delegates would adopt an attitude that radically differed from the one commonly associated with Belgian pre-war diplomacy, “when the country’s foreign policy was of an unmatched timidity and our diplomats were afraid of their own shadows.”¹⁵³⁵

However, despite several warnings to “our diplomats” from Dumont-Wilden’s colleagues, who argued that in Versailles they would have to fight their “supreme battle” and that “our future” fully depended upon “their perspicacity and energy”, a few months later another colleague had to regretfully find that Belgian diplomats had suffered a huge diplomatic defeat. This journalist referred to the resolution of 4 June 1919, by which “Holland would not have to return a shred of Belgian soil.” This failure, he noted, made “the country” fully aware of “the inconveniences of this timidity and this lack of preparation which are the essential defaults of our diplomacy.”¹⁵³⁶

In the wake of the Versailles conference, journalists of *La Nation belge* continued to blame “our diplomats” for the failure of Belgian annexationism. One journalist argued that they had “poorly approached the Belgian-Dutch problem”, while another one accused them of “leading us to an unnatural entente” by striving for an economic agreement with the Netherlands instead, and yet another one more generally repeated that “since the armistice, our diplomacy has only registered failures.”¹⁵³⁷

¹⁵³⁴ DUMONT-WILDEN, Louis, “Courrier de Paris”, *La Nation belge*, 22 March 1919.

¹⁵³⁵ DUMONT-WILDEN, Louis, “La Belgique et la liberté de l’Escaut. Il faut exiger de la Hollande qu’elle nous rende la clef de notre maison”, *La Nation belge*, 12 December 1918.

¹⁵³⁶ ANONYMOUS, “La bataille suprême pour nos diplomates. Notre avenir tout entier dépend de leur clairvoyance et leur énergie”, *La Nation belge*, 4 June 1919; ANONYMOUS, “Erreurs diplomatiques”, *La Nation belge*, 12 June 1919. See also NEURAY, Fernand, “La diplomatie belge en Hollande”, *La Nation belge*, 25 March 1919.

¹⁵³⁷ The quotes are from BERNARD, Charles, “L’atout d’Hollande”, *La Nation belge*, 7 September 1919; ANONYMOUS, “Une alliance hollando-belge. C’est à cette entente contre nature que voudraient nous mener

Neuray and his collaborators also started looking for ways to make sure that in the future these failures would not occur again. As we will see in the next section, some of these suggested solutions involved reforming the organization of the Belgian diplomatic career. Another line of thinking, however, transcended the practice of diplomacy and would have certainly met with the approval of Pierre Orts. In late June 1919, two days before the peace was signed in Versailles, a journalist writing under the pseudonym of Agricola advanced a solution which indeed fitted perfectly within Belgian nationalist ideology. Identifying “the deeper reason for our misfortunes” in the absence in Belgium of “a public opinion about foreign policy issues,” Agricola exhorted “the government, the press, the field of education, and the elites” to abandon their party political and factional spirit in favour of working towards the true interests of Belgium. “If the Belgians had been taught a veracious and living national history”, he specified, “we would have had politicians and diplomats at our disposal who were capable to understand that the moment would come to repair old and flagrant injustices to our profit.” This “enlightened public opinion”, Agricola regretted with some sense of self-satisfaction, was only to be found in “a very small group of enlightened and courageous men.” In his view, the most ideal circumstances to obtain a greater Belgium had passed. Nevertheless, he proceeded, the Versailles treaty was “evidently provisory” and could still be modified, so that the Belgian nation could in the future strategically put into action “a public opinion which would finally be enlightened, healed from its ignorance, its party political prejudice and its illusions.” Such a national public opinion, Agricola concluded, would be sufficiently strong to act on our government, and through it, on our Allies.”¹⁵³⁸

In the following months, Agricola’s colleagues reiterated the importance of an ‘educated’ political opinion. One of them even acknowledged that the diplomatic victory of the Netherlands over Belgium was not only the result of “the skill of their diplomacy” but also of the support of “a public opinion which has long been styled.” This contrasted sharply with “the weakness of our diplomacy”, he explained, which was “poorly supported by a disunited people whose political education remains to be done.” This disunity, he explained, referred to the Flemish militants who in his opinion served the Dutch government rather than the Belgian state and had even suggested that nationalist elements within the Belgian government were

nos diplomates”, *La Nation belge*, 12 October 1919; ANONYMOUS, “Les pourparlers hollando-belges”, *La Nation belge*, 7 December 1919.

¹⁵³⁸ AGRICOLA [pseudonym of a certain Abbé Thiry from the Belgian province of Luxembourg], “Pour que la fait soit meilleure. Faisons l’éducation nationale de notre opinion,” *La Nation belge*, 26 June 1919.

ready to wage war against the Netherlands. The journalist denied this, arguing that “we will use more prudence and more reserve.”¹⁵³⁹

It seems that as the line of thought about educating public opinion further developed, journalists from *La Nation belge* finally started to plead for an open diplomacy. However, they did not connect this plea to pacifist sentiments or to the ideology of Wilson, who in their opinion had revealed himself as “a fully devoted friend of Holland” and thus as an enemy of Belgium.¹⁵⁴⁰ Rather, they felt that if the educated public opinion was well-informed about the country’s diplomatic affairs, it would certainly lend Belgian diplomacy its full support in acquiring the territories they believed Belgium needed to safeguard its future growth. Commenting on a government change in late November 1919, one journalist claimed that among the new ministers, several had denounced “the perils of secret diplomacy.” This seems to have strengthened his belief that his appeal to involve public opinion in foreign policy-making would not fall on deaf ears. He therefore insisted that “the interests of the Fatherland demand that public opinion receives all the necessary precisions” about the new government’s policy towards Luxembourg and the Netherlands. “Public opinion wants to know,” he argued, “if the blood of our soldiers has been or has not been shed in vain.”¹⁵⁴¹ The absence of “diplomatic secretiveness”, another journalist argued a few weeks later, would enable the Belgian public to understand that the country needed a strong army to achieve its foreign policy aims. If the Belgian army was still as strong as it was in the final months of the war, he rhetorically asked, “would Holland then have dared to taunt us like she has done all through our negotiations?” Unconsciously contradicting the words, written a few months earlier, of his colleague Bernard, this journalist wondered when the Belgian people would understand that “good soldiers in our barracks do more for the success of our foreign relations than the efforts of fifty diplomats.”¹⁵⁴²

In comparison with the journalists of *La Nation belge*, contributors to *Le Soir* manifested less bellicose sentiments and were somewhat more implicit in their desire for Belgian territorial expansion. They seem to have primarily focused on maligning the Dutch government and the Luxembourgish dynasty by incessantly repeating that during the war

¹⁵³⁹ BERNARD, Charles, “L’atout d’Hollande”, *La Nation belge*, 7 September 1919. See also ESMOND, “Courrier de Londres. Les relations anglo-belges. Le ‘regrettable silence’”, *La Nation belge*, 7 August 1919.

¹⁵⁴⁰ BERNARD, Charles, “L’atout d’Hollande”, *La Nation belge*, 7 September 1919.

¹⁵⁴¹ ANONYMOUS, “La démission du cabinet. M. Léon Delacroix est chargé de dénouer la crise”, *La Nation belge*, 24 November 1919.

¹⁵⁴² HENRIQUET, M., “La Belgique et les négociations de Londres”, *La Nation belge*, 14 December 1919. See also HENRIQUET, M., “On prétend ressusciter notre neutralité ‘garantie’. La France et l’Angleterre offriraient de protéger notre intégrité territoriale pendant cinq ans, à condition que nous souscrivions à une promesse de neutralité”, *La Nation belge*, 8 December 1919.

both had been overly friendly with the German government and army.¹⁵⁴³ In the columns of *Le Soir*, annexationist aspirations were not explicitly connected to rejections of secret diplomacy. However, this paradox ('paradox' in the light of the new international political culture) did not seem to have bothered the newspaper's editors either. They indeed offered a wide forum to two politicians who seemed to have fully interiorized the paradox. These were the Socialist annexationists Louis Piérard and Jules Destrée. As political editor of *Le Soir*, Edmond Patris published not only many of Piérard's and Destrée's opinion pieces about the aims and methods of Belgian foreign policy but also very biased reporting of their roles in political gatherings.¹⁵⁴⁴

In these articles, buyers of *Le Soir* could read how both Socialists fiercely criticized the "secret diplomacy" of the Belgian delegation in Versailles and tried to reconcile their territorial aspirations with the principles of New Diplomacy. Piérard and Destrée endeavoured to convince their fellow party-members and those of the more than 150.000 readers of *Le Soir* who were not yet convinced, that such reconciliation was possible on the condition that the people's right of self-determination was respected.

Covering a meeting of the Socialist Party in mid-March 1919, Patris (or one of his collaborators) claimed to have witnessed how Piérard reacted with much dignity during the booing of part of the audience when he took the word. Our quarrel is just one of terminology, the dissident Socialist is reported to have stated, explaining that "if for you the word annexationist implies [...] attaching a population to us against its will, then I am an anti-annexationist." Piérard specified that he was "so little annexationist" that "even if during the coming negotiations Holland would accept to give up the enclave of Maastricht", he found that the population of this city in Dutch Limburg should be consulted. On the understanding, he quickly added, that this consultation transpired "loyally, without official pressure, and under the control of the League of Nations." Patris approvingly noted that Piérard told his audience that it should not attack Destrée and him, but rather the government. "Whatever our opinion about the problems," Piérard stated, "we all loath the secret diplomacy which operates in the half light of the chancelleries." Having established common ground with the audience, he then exclaimed "Well now! That is the kind of diplomacy practiced by the Belgian government."¹⁵⁴⁵ The editors of *Le Soir* had long been convinced that Piérard shared their views on Belgian foreign policy. About two months before the Socialist meeting they had

¹⁵⁴³ DEVLEESHOUWER, "L'opinion publique", 216-219.

¹⁵⁴⁴ DE WAELE, *Naar een groter België*, 883-898.

¹⁵⁴⁵ ANONYMOUS [Edmond Patris, most likely], "La Belgique de demain. Un meeting socialiste", *Le Soir*, 15 March 1919.

already published one of his opinion pieces about Dutch Limburg, in which he elaborated on the province's historical ties to the Belgian province of Liège and denounced the allegedly pro-German attitudes of the Dutch government during the war. In another opinion piece, Piérard claimed that this government threatened the population of Dutch Limburg with repercussions if it would manifest its presumed pro-Belgian sentiments.¹⁵⁴⁶ In the wake of the Socialist Party meeting, this communion of ideas with Piérard had incited the editors of *Le Soir* to send him as a “special envoy” to Luxembourg in order to, in the words of the Socialist, “feel the pulse of Luxembourgish public opinion” in the build-up to the referendums which would decide about their economic and political future. In the Grand Duchy, Piérard probably realized very soon that most people actually opposed a rapprochement with Belgium, and that therefore appealing to the people's right of self-determination would not turn out the way he had hoped. He tried to work his way around this by having the minority of pro-Belgian politicians state in the name of the Luxembourgers that “we do not know ourselves what we want; this is called the right of peoples to self-determination...” In a very suggestive manner, Piérard had pro-Belgian Socialist and progressive Liberal MP's attribute the fact that “the poorly enlightened public opinion does not know where its interest lies” to anti-Belgian machinations and “secret diplomacy” of the Luxembourgish government.¹⁵⁴⁷

The editors of *Le Soir* also relished the interventions of Jules Destrée in the Chamber of Representatives. Contrary to Piérard, Destrée did not assail the Belgian government and its delegation in Versailles but rather the Big Four and their diplomatic procedures. In a Chamber session in mid-April 1919, he demanded that the Allies would finally make clear what they were prepared to do for Belgium and had this request followed by the exclamation “Enough secret diplomacy, enough!” Patris claimed to know perfectly well what Destrée was after. He therefore commented that “we salute with great joy the enthusiastic reception [...] of M. Destrée's discourse” and added that “the Allies need to know that the entire country, through its legitimate representatives, is intimately united around the national government, which in Paris demands reparations, restitutions and guarantees.”¹⁵⁴⁸ In an opinion piece published in *Le Soir* a few weeks later, Destrée made it clear that although the Belgian government had received from the Allies promises for ample reparations, the Belgians were not like other peoples and therefore deserved more than financial compensations, particularly from “England gorged with territories.” The Socialist publicist also directly criticized the American

¹⁵⁴⁶ PIÉRARD, Louis, “Pourquoi Guillaume II s'en fuit en Hollande”, *Le Soir*, 21 January 1919; PIÉRARD, Louis, “Une voix du Limbourg cédé”, *Le Soir*, 11 March 1919.

¹⁵⁴⁷ PIÉRARD, Louis, “Le referendum au Luxembourg”, *Le Soir*, 18 April 1919.

¹⁵⁴⁸ ANONYMOUS [Edmond Patris, most likely], “Les revendications de la Belgique”, *Le Soir*, 18 April 1919.

President, describing him as “more omnipotent than the Sun King ever was.” While he claimed that Wilson’s proclamations had once thrilled him with enthusiasm, he declared himself to be “sceptical about the progress of democracy in 1919 and of the right of the peoples to self-determination.” For six months, Destrée explained, “the man who denounced secret diplomacy is keeping us in the thickest and most pernicious darkness.” Probably knowing that in late 1918 Wilson had called the then imminent Paris peace conference “a meeting of the servants of the people” as opposed to the “congress of patrons” which had taken place a century earlier, he concluded that “this congress of democracies is worse than the 1815 Congress of Vienna.”¹⁵⁴⁹ Destrée seemingly tried to contest the American President’s authority, representing him as an autocrat who practised the old diplomacy. After the Versailles treaty had been signed, he set himself up as a righteous advocate of the right of the peoples to self-determination, applying this principle to the population of Dutch Limbourg. “No people can be held against its will under a sovereignty which it does not accept,” he argued, explaining that “it is to the people, and not to diplomats and to their governments, to decide about their fate.”¹⁵⁵⁰ Despite so many indications to the contrary, Destrée still believed in the pro-Belgian sentiments of these Dutch citizens and blamed the perseverance of traditional diplomatic practice for impeding the materialization of their aspirations.

Remarkably enough, apart from one or two exceptions, in *Le Soir* criticisms of secret diplomacy before, during and immediately after the Paris peace conference emanated only from the mouths and the pens of Destrée and Piérard. The newspaper’s journalists might not have felt the need to justify their annexationist aspirations in the framework of the principles of New Diplomacy. Given the many messages pointing to the predominantly anti- rather than pro-Belgian sentiments among the populations of the targeted territories, they might have indeed felt that invoking these principles was rather risky. Perhaps they even believed that their country’s delegation would have stood a better chance in the framework of the old diplomacy, when victorious war regularly led to annexations.

Evaluating the contents of articles relating to the peace conference and its aftermath published in *Le Soir* and *La Nation belge* leads to the rather unsurprising conclusion that contributors to these nationalist newspapers were fairly sceptical, not to say hostile towards the internationalist principles that grounded the international political culture promoted by

¹⁵⁴⁹ DESTRÉE, Jules, “La victoire aux fruits aigres”, *Le Soir*, 10 May 1919. For Wilson’s speech, see ALCESTE, “Il y a cent ans”, *La Dernière Heure*, 26 December 1918.

¹⁵⁵⁰ DESTRÉE, Jules, “Ce qu’on m’a dit à Maastricht”, *Le Soir*, 19 July 1919.

Wilson. They did not seem to associate the ideal of an open and public diplomacy with achieving a durable international peace. Moreover, in their opinion open diplomacy could only work if the public was 'educated' so as to become imbued with nationalist principles. Contrary to the editors and journalists of anti-annexationist newspapers such as *De Standaard* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*, those of *La Nation belge* and – perhaps to a minor extent – those of *Le Soir* indeed did not seem to believe that the people were inherently pacifist world citizens. Instead, they believed that the Belgians together constituted an organism which had to grow and become aware of its relative strength in a competition with smaller and larger organisms.

The Nationalist Press on Belgian Diplomats

The great frustration of the nationalist journalists and publicists was perhaps that those elements of the Belgian organism responsible for communicating with other organisms were insufficiently aware of the organism's needs. Whether these men were career diplomats or politicians chosen to represent the country at the peace conference and in commissions afterwards, contributors to *La Nation belge* and *Le Soir* did not think very highly of them. Of course, there were degrees in their appreciation and differences between *La Nation belge* and *Le Soir*. As we will see in this section, the editors of the nationalist press had in common that they regularly published personal attacks against the members of the diplomatic corps who had opposed the annexationist policies they advocated. These career diplomats only account for the smaller part of the 'diplomats' mentioned in the above articles. The larger part refers to politicians like Hymans, Vandervelde and even Segers, the former annexationist who had allegedly turned soft by accepting to give up Belgium's territorial claims in order to increase the success of a Belgian-Dutch economic agreement. Journalists of *La Nation belge* ascribed the same timidity and weakness to these politician-diplomats as they had done to career diplomats before and during the war.

With the exception of those writing for the nationalist press, in the first years after the armistice journalists of Belgian newspapers hardly ever commented on the qualities of individual members of their country's diplomatic corps. The only career diplomat who very occasionally figured in their columns owed his renown to his former functions as Foreign Minister. Baron Beyens had indeed become much better known to for instance journalists of *De Standaard* and *La Libre Belgique*. The editors of these newspapers positively appreciated

how he had represented Belgium on the international scene.¹⁵⁵¹ Most journalists of the nationalist press did not.

Beyens was certainly not the only member of the diplomatic career who had to read offensive comments about his qualities as a diplomat. Another one was Baron Albéric Fallon, who until the Spring of 1919 was Belgium's minister plenipotentiary in The Hague. After news had reached Fernand Neuray that Fallon would be removed from the Dutch capital, the editor of *La Nation belge* devoted a large opinion piece to the workings of the Belgian legation in the Netherlands. After repeatedly claiming that he did not want to personally accuse Fallon, Neuray applauded his removal arguing that "it is not prudent to inflict the prison of old wineskins to the bubbling of new wine." While the new wine arguably referred to the new Belgian nation which was rejuvenated by the war and had cast off the bridle of obligatory neutrality, the old wineskins no doubt stood for the diplomats of the so-called generation of neutrality. Neuray indeed explained that the entry into the war "made us into a national personality, a pawn – but what an important one! – on the European chessboard." Since "Belgium" had never played this game before, it needed "a new mentality and new methods." Yet, Neuray opposed, "how to expect a sudden and radical transformation of men who were all over fifty."¹⁵⁵²

This kind of generational thinking pervaded the views of many Belgian nationalists on the country's diplomacy and diplomats. It also reminds of how Orts and Bassompierre perceived their own curtailment whilst serving under Beyens and Van der Elst. However, Neuray did not seem to fully believe that the younger generation of Belgian diplomats all defended the country's interests in the way he deemed fit. The editor of *La Nation belge* felt that "the very serious affair that we have at the moment with Holland could have been avoided" and therefore wished "that the role of the Belgian legation in Holland is subjected to a thorough investigation." He argued that such investigation could free the road for "a few young diplomats who have the ambition [...] to rapidly climb the ladder which leads to the top of the career."¹⁵⁵³

But what exactly did Neuray suspect these young men and their older chief of? In an exposé which contained several elements of self-congratulation, the editor explained that from the end of 1914 onwards there were Belgians who predicted "the impossibility of a neutral Belgium in a new Europe." From this knowledge, those Belgians had immediately deduced

¹⁵⁵¹ See, in addition to the aforementioned article of Van Cauwelaert, INNOMINATO, "La chronique des événements. M. Beyens à Berlin", *La Libre Belgique*, 9 November 1919.

¹⁵⁵² NEURAY, Fernand, "La diplomatie belge en Hollande", *La Nation belge*, 25 March 1919.

¹⁵⁵³ NEURAY, Fernand, "La diplomatie belge en Hollande", *La Nation belge*, 25 March 1919.

that after the war had ended “the Scheldt and Meuse questions would arise between neutral and indifferent Holland, and Belgium, who would have to choose between its own death or the closure and fortification of its open and dismantled northern and eastern borders.” The same Belgians, Neuray repeated with a reference to the words of his colleague Dumont-Wilden, knew that “there was a time when the Meuse and the Scheldt were Belgian, that the Dutch have taken the key and the lock of our house,” and that “the victorious Entente and victorious Belgium would be sure to ask them back.” One wonders how Neuray had become convinced that the governments of France and Great-Britain would accept the metaphor, often used in *La Nation belge*, of the keys to the Belgian house, and more importantly, the implications of this metaphor. At any rate, the conviction that his and other nationalists’ ideas about the country’s future borders were shared by the members of the Entente led him to ask “the men who have represented us in The Hague” whether they had listened to “the warnings of Belgians who had predicted this inevitable, this ineluctable claim.” If they had, Neuray argued, they would have “gently enlightened” the Dutch government about the consequences of all the calamities caused by the Dutch “complaisance to Berlin.” If they had, he continued, they would have done everything they could to induce the Dutch government “to gallantly repair the injustice which, three quarters of a century after 1839, has cost Belgium thousands of human lives [...] and streams of blood.” These were heavy charges. Surely, Neuray put the principal blame on the Dutch government but he did accuse, or at least suspect, the diplomats at the Belgian legation in The Hague and in the first place Fallon as their chief, of complicity. “If it is their fault that the belatedly discovered and dressed wound has grown and become infected,” he repeated using organic imagery, “the country should know and the Power should immediately take the necessary sanctions.”¹⁵⁵⁴

The ‘Power’ probably referred to the executive power, which in Neuray’s ideal authoritarian society would be strengthened to dominate political decision-making. The editor of *La Nation belge* also had an idea of the place of diplomats in this society. He argued that “the true and effective responsibility of the men invested with the fearsome honour to represent and defend the honour and the interest of the nation abroad has to be the corner stone of the new Belgium.” According to him, diplomats ought to be warriors fighting for their country in a conflictual world. Neuray added that Fallon’s successor, the politician Carton de Wiart, whose “brilliant qualities were the fruit of a very rich nature”, would be perfectly suited for such task. However, Neuray did not wish Carton to stay in diplomacy,

¹⁵⁵⁴ NEURAY, Fernand, “La diplomatie belge en Hollande”, *La Nation belge*, 25 March 1919.

suggesting that success in the Netherlands would earn the former Justice Minister the posting of leader of the nation.¹⁵⁵⁵ Implicitly, Neuray was repeating the argument uttered by Alphonse Nothomb in the 1895 Foreign Affairs budget discussion in the Chamber. Like Nothomb, Neuray felt that national politicians were perfectly suited for missions abroad because they stood in close contact with the nation, or to rephrase in the organic terminology both men often applied, because they had the blood of the nation running through their veins and breathed the same air as the nation did. Of course, this implied that their missions could only be of a temporary nature.

Fallon did not like what he read in *La Nation belge* of 25 March 1919. “If this journalist had taken on me alone,” he wrote to Hymans with a sense of self-abnegation, “I would perhaps not have complained.” Yet, Fallon argued, Neuray had jeopardized the careers of his collaborators. In these circumstances, he could not but energetically protest against what he labelled as “truly anti-patriotic imputations.” Although Fallon suggested that he was prepared to accept criticism from journalists, he opposed that “writing that I have sacrificed the dignity of Belgium is truly going beyond the limits of criticism.” For the sake of the junior diplomats who had worked under his command, he claimed, he requested the Foreign Minister to intervene and stop “this campaign directed against the Legation of the King.”¹⁵⁵⁶ As such, Fallon linked his and his collaborators’ dignity with the dignity of the Belgian sovereign, which was a connection that Neuray would probably not have made. Arguably, this connection illustrates the difference in how both men conceived a diplomat’s duties, and more generally, Belgium’s interests.

Fallon asked his (former) collaborators to write to Hymans as well. One of them argued that the members of the Belgian legation in The Hague had merely executed the instructions of “the King’s government”, while another one claimed not to know examples of too good relations with a government leading to the failure of negotiations.¹⁵⁵⁷ The latter remark came from André de Kerchove de Denterghem, who as we have seen was one of few Belgian junior diplomats who during the war abandoned his annexationist ideas and loyally worked with Fallon to counter Belgian annexationist propaganda. At least partly, Kerchove had adopted this stance out of gratitude towards the then Foreign Minister Baron Beyens, who had transferred him from Bucharest to The Hague after a conflict between Kerchove and the Belgian head of legation in Romania had gotten out of hand. Saved by Beyens in August

¹⁵⁵⁵ NEURAY, Fernand, “La diplomatie belge en Hollande”, *La Nation belge*, 25 March 1919.

¹⁵⁵⁶ AMBZ, PF 113, “Albéric Fallon”, Albéric Fallon to Paul Hymans, 27 March 1919.

¹⁵⁵⁷ AMBZ, PF 113, “Albéric Fallon”, Anonymous to Paul Hymans, 8 April 1919; André de Kerchove de Denterghem to Paul Hymans, 16 April 1919.

1915, Kerchove confided to him that he had never felt so much gratitude and hoped to one day be able to return the favour, concluding his letter declaring that “and a Kerchove always keeps his word.”¹⁵⁵⁸

In his letter to Hymans written upon Fallon’s request in April 1919, Kerchove referred to Neuray’s accusation that everything the personnel of the legation did was nourishing their friendship with the Dutch Queen and her ministers.¹⁵⁵⁹ For Fallon, the activities invoked by his subordinates ranked among the core tasks of a Belgian diplomat; working towards natural borders did not. Fallon also stressed that, as a diplomat, he was not allowed “to directly address myself to the editor of *La Nation belge*, nor to summon him to court or to public opinion.” Kerchove wrote more or less the same.¹⁵⁶⁰ The fact that they wished to react nonetheless suggests that diplomats felt that the influence of public, or at least published opinion on their careers and on their personal honour had increased since the war’s end. It also added to the appeal they made to Hymans.

However, their letters had to pass over the desks of Orts and Bassompierre first. One could suspect these men of sharing Neuray’s sentiments towards Fallon. Had they not repeatedly taken offense at the diplomat’s anti-annexationist stance? However, the Secretary-General and the Political Director seem to have felt some loyalty towards the members of the house that they worked in. Seemingly, the fact that the war was over softened their aversion towards the diplomats of the generation of neutrality. In the Summer of 1919, Bassompierre would even try to persuade Hymans to recall the diplomats fallen in disgrace back into active service. In at least one case, he managed to have a diplomat whom Hymans had wished to “eliminate”, appointed to head one of Belgium’s legations. Of course, the functions Bassompierre wished to confer upon these diplomats entailed a loss of prestige for each of them.¹⁵⁶¹ Nevertheless, in the long run it still offered them an opportunity to erase the humiliations they had suffered.

At any rate, allegations such as those published by Neuray moreover put the honour of the diplomatic career at stake. This was something Orts and Bassompierre certainly wished to

¹⁵⁵⁸ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 51, André de Kerchove de Denterghem to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 25 August 1915. This file also contains interesting letters about the conflict between Kerchove and his chief Maximilien van Ypersele de Strihou.

¹⁵⁵⁹ NEURAY, Fernand, “La diplomatie belge en Hollande”, *La Nation belge*, 25 March 1919.

¹⁵⁶⁰ AMBZ, PF 113, “Albéric Fallon”, Albéric Fallon to Paul Hymans, 27 March 1919; André de Kerchove de Denterghem to Paul Hymans, 16 April 1919.

¹⁵⁶¹ See AMBZ, 12.937, “Réorganisation des corps diplomatiques et consulaires”, Note of Direction P, 17 and 18 July 1919; ARA, T 225, “Papiers de Borchgrave”, n° 317, Albert de Bassompierre to Roger de Borchgrave, 26 August 1919. The diplomat Bassompierre managed to ‘save’ was Charles Wauters, who had been discredited for alleged interactions with German diplomats during the war in Sweden, where he headed the Belgian legation. He was sent to Athens, a far less prestigious posting.

avoid. Orts indeed acknowledged that Fallon had made “just complaints” and Bassompierre deemed that Fallon and his collaborators did not deserve the “humiliation” inflicted upon them by Neuray, whose accusations were “imprecise and unfounded”. There was no way, the Political Director acknowledged, that Belgian diplomats in the Netherlands could have avoided Dutch anxiety over the perspective of a territorial diminution. Moreover, he added, Fallon and his collaborators had only executed the instructions coming from Le Havre and which stated that they should take no initiative until the war was over. “So if there is a fault, it should not be imputed on the Legation in The Hague,” he noted. Was this an implicit criticism on the Foreign Minister and his predecessors, most notably Beyens, whose neutralist policy had long irritated Bassompierre? If this was so, the criticism was directed to Hymans as well, who since January 1918 had been able to change the instructions to Belgian diplomats. Another reason to react, Bassompierre wrote, was that the Foreign Ministry could not “leave our diplomats – the Representatives of the King abroad – at the mercy of just anybody – even a journalist – who [...] taints the reputation of the government’s agents as he pleases.” In a democracy even the freedom of the press should have its limits, so Bassompierre seemed to suggest, and these limits lay where the dignity of the King and diplomats as his embodiments were at stake. The Political Director was not really in favour of sending an open letter to *La Nation belge* and suggested to Hymans instead that Orts would personally approach Neuray, demanding that the editor specified his accusations or withdrew them.¹⁵⁶²

Surely, Hymans knew perfectly well that also this measure would possibly start a polemic. He therefore agreed that Orts would go and see the editor of *La Nation belge* personally but specified that the Secretary-General should simply urge Neuray to stop the “unjust campaign” and to publish an article minimizing his attacks on Fallon and his collaborators. The Foreign Minister also drew on his long experience as a national political leader under constant attack from adverse newspaper editors to enlighten Belgian diplomats that “in the present times it is impossible to arm oneself against attacks from the press.” Much more than before the war, so Hymans seemed to suggest, journalists had caught sight of diplomats and diplomats would have to accept the consequences of this public exposure. The Foreign Minister had also noticed Bassompierre’s implicit criticism of the instructions sent to Belgian diplomats. In the letter he wrote to Fallon, he took over the Political Director’s arguments in favour of Fallon and his collaborators but deleted the one about the instructions, writing instead that threatening the Dutch government to take away part of their territory at a

¹⁵⁶² AMBZ, PF 113, “Albéric Fallon”, Note of the Secretariat-General, 29 March 1919; Note of Direction P, s.d. [29 or 31 March 1919].

time when chances between the Allies and the Central Powers were even, would have been “of the utmost clumsiness”. The Foreign Minister also tried to repair at least part of the damage done to Fallon’s honour. Not only did the diplomat obtain a promotion in the Order of Leopold, but Hymans also decided to offer him a new diplomatic posting. While the Belgian legation in Bucharest was not exactly the place where a diplomat coming from The Hague expected to go, Fallon accepted.¹⁵⁶³ After all, a lot of his colleagues who had shared his foreign policy views were far worse off. Furthermore, Romania had been an ally during the war and had always been one of the more prestigious legations in Central-Europe.

While Neuray seems to have refrained from further attacking Fallon, other nationalist journalists and publicists conveyed similar messages in the columns of their journals. In *Le Soir*, Edmond Patris published a small piece in which he commented on Fallon’s transfer to Bucharest. “After having inadequately represented us in Holland,” Patris wrote, Fallon was “going to poorly defend us in Romania.”¹⁵⁶⁴ In the wake of the armistice, several of Neuray’s former collaborators had founded weeklies and monthlies in which they exhibited their nationalist ideas. Maurice des Ombiaux, for instance, had created *La Revue belge*, which claimed to have “no other doctrine than a national doctrine.” He was also closely involved in *L’Horizon politique, économique, littéraire et colonial*.¹⁵⁶⁵ Criticisms of Belgian diplomacy and diplomats regularly filled the pages of these journals. So too in the Spring of 1919. The editors of both *L’Horizon* and *La Revue belge* printed virtually the same accusation and in a very similar way as Neuray had done. All Fallon and his collaborators had occupied themselves with, their journalists argued, was pleasing the Dutch court and its high society at the bridge table, during hunting and dinner parties, and on the dancefloor. Instead, Gaston Pomba of *La Revue belge* argued, they should have spent their evenings studying the Scheldt and Meuse questions and informing the Belgian government in lucid reports about the complexities of these problems. Since they had not, Pomba fully supported the actions of Belgian journalists who with their articles had planted “banderillas in the perfumed skins of these misters.” Belgian diplomats in The Hague, he continued, had disseminated the image of Belgium as “a great courtesan, like the Lady of the Camellias.” He would have certainly preferred them to propagate a firmer, less submissive and more ‘masculine’ attitude.¹⁵⁶⁶

¹⁵⁶³ AMBZ, PF 113, “Albéric Fallon”, Paul Hymans to Albéric Fallon, 2 May 1919; Albéric Fallon to Paul Hymans, 8 May 1919.

¹⁵⁶⁴ PATRIS, Edmond, “Petite Gazette. Notre corps diplomatique”, *Le Soir*, 5 May 1919.

¹⁵⁶⁵ DES OMBIAUX, Maurice and Eugène MEURIS, “Notre programme”, *La Revue belge*, 1/1, 1918, 1. On Des Ombiaux, see HOREMANS, Jean-M., “Ombiaux (Maurice-Joseph des)”, *BN*, 38, 1973, 640-651.

¹⁵⁶⁶ POMBA, Gaston, “La Réforme de la diplomatie”, *La Revue belge* 2/1, 1919, 572-574. The article of *L’Horizon* is partly reproduced in Pomba’s article.

As the words of Pomba illustrate, nationalist journalists were out to take revenge on the diplomats whom they believed had damaged the interests of the nation. They seemed to believe it was their task, as voices of the nation, to reveal the misdeeds of the country's diplomats during and after the war and thus to put pressure on the men who decided about the fate of these diplomats. No longer limited in their actions by war censorship, they possessed great liberty to do so.

Contrary to Fallon, in the afterwar period Baron Beyens was no longer subjected to attacks from Fernand Neuray or from other journalists of *La Nation belge*. As we have seen, once the diplomat had left the Foreign Ministry, Neuray had ceased fire and had even come to respect his former enemy's points of view. Throughout 1918, Beyens wrote a number of articles about the future of small states in the French journal *Revue des deux mondes*.¹⁵⁶⁷ Neuray published large sections of these essays in *La Nation belge*, stressing the viewpoints about Belgian foreign policy and diplomacy in general that he had in common with Beyens while at the same minimizing the differences of opinion which still existed between them.¹⁵⁶⁸ This must have required considerable intellectual flexibility from the editor of *La Nation belge*. One senior diplomat who had read Beyens's articles as well actually congratulated him for never having mistaken patriotism for "narrow chauvinism", the very ideology he implicitly accused Neuray of propagating.¹⁵⁶⁹

In March 1918, also Van der Elst congratulated Beyens on the publication of his articles. The diplomat replied that writing them helped him to alleviate the sorrow of not being able to serve the country. So did the letters of support from colleagues, he added. Gaiffier had apparently even urged him to write a letter to the King, to straighten things out. Beyens, however, believed that the King still did not want to see him. Neither did he want to

¹⁵⁶⁷ See BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, "L'avenir des petits États. – I. Leur utilité et leur importance", *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 January 1918, 38-63; BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, "L'avenir des petits États. – II. La Roumanie", *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 January 1918, 314-337; BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, "L'avenir des petits États. – III. La Serbie", *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 March 1918, 218-306; BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, "L'avenir des petits États. – IV. La Bulgarie", *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 Avril 1918, 874-894; BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, "L'avenir des petits États. – V. La Belgique", *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 Juillet 1918, 128-160; BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, "L'avenir des petits États", *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 Septembre 1918, 135-152.

¹⁵⁶⁸ See for instance STYLO [Fernand Neuray], "Gare aux pièges allemands", *La Nation belge*, 1 January 1918; STYLO, "La Belgique d'hier et l'Europe de demain", *La Nation belge*, 2 January 1918; ANONYMOUS, "Pensées", *La Nation belge*, 19 January 1918; ANONYMOUS, "Le Roi Carol et la Belgique", *La Nation belge*, 21 January 1918; ANONYMOUS, "Ferdinand Ier Tsar de Bulgarie", *La Nation belge*, 21 April 1918; ANONYMOUS, "Les idées qui marchent. Plus de neutralité garantie. M. le baron Beyens se prononce à son tour contre le maintien de la neutralité", *La Nation belge*, 14 July 1918; ANONYMOUS, "Ce que disent les journaux", *La Nation belge*, 3 December 1918.

¹⁵⁶⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 50, Joseph Mélot to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 17 January 1918.

take the initiative to contact Albert.¹⁵⁷⁰ However, a few months later, Beyens did send Count Frédéric van den Steen a copy of his most recent book *La Question africaine*, with the request to offer it to the King. The book described the recent history of the Belgian colony and contained arguments for its preservation which clearly appealed to Albert. In late September 1918, he ordered his chef de cabinet to invite Beyens for dinner.¹⁵⁷¹ In combination with the power of the gift, the fact that Van den Steen, who was known to Albert as a friend of the disgraced diplomat, was at the time gravely injured and hospitalized after a fall from his horse, might have contributed to the King's leniency towards Beyens. Van den Steen died less than two weeks later. Commenting on the departure of his colleague and friend, Beyens wrote to Van der Elst that he had wished that the King would have appointed Van den Steen instead of him as Foreign Minister. "My true place was abroad and I did not aspire to anything else," Beyens asserted, regretfully finding that "now the diplomatic career seems forever closed to me." He claimed that he would get used to the idea and did not even hope that there would be "a small place" for him at the peace conference. "If a bad peace had to be signed," he remarked, "one would perhaps have appealed to my patriotism."¹⁵⁷²

About fifteen months after he had been forced to resign as Foreign Minister, Beyens's heart was still full of bitterness. As he wrote in his diaries a few years later, not giving "a great posting abroad" to "a diplomat who had sacrificed himself to lead the Foreign Ministry in extremely difficult times" was just "a deep humiliation." Beyens added that he had given to the functionaries at the Department "the example of hard work" by spending more hours a day at his desk than they did and by never going for a pleasure car-ride, which many of them regularly did. This "life of devotion" that he had led without interruption for more than two years surely deserved a diplomatic posting abroad, Beyens found, all the more since the war had halved the fortune of his wife and he needed to support his family.¹⁵⁷³

As such, the sentiments of resignation expressed in his letter to Van der Elst clearly concealed his true ambitions. Beyens had indeed not given up hope to pursue his diplomatic

¹⁵⁷⁰ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 18 March 1918.

¹⁵⁷¹ 1914-1918, n° 17, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 25 September 1918. See also BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, *La Question africaine: le Portugal, l'Etat indépendant du Congo, le Congo belge, l'avenir de l'Afrique*, Brussels, 1918. As Hannes Vanhauwaert argues, Beyens respected Leopold II for having provided Belgium with a colony, but could not be ranked among those diplomats and politicians who had interiorized what Viaene has labelled as the 'colonial mind'. See VANHAUWAERT, *All the King's Men*, Chapter Eight.

¹⁵⁷² ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 27 October 1918. See also, in the same archive, n° 123, Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay to Léon van der Elst, 11 May 1918.

¹⁵⁷³ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 65, Journal 'Mon Ambassade à Rome', 1, 1921, 1-4.

career. In a way, his regular publication of articles in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which was widely read in French-speaking political circles, helped to keep him in the picture and allowed him to maintain contact with Hymans, who throughout 1918 regularly congratulated him on these writings, asked him for advice concerning future reforms inside the Foreign Ministry, and occasionally sent him on short trips to London with messages for the British government. While Beyens was glad to do this, he could not conceal his frustration with how he was treated. In one letter to Hymans, he stressed the ignorance of many of the Foreign Minister's colleagues who actually believed that Belgium could "recuperate" Dutch Limburg and Zeeland Flanders.¹⁵⁷⁴ Given that Hymans himself had come to believe that this was possible, Beyens's statements might not have done his ambitions much good.

At any rate, Beyens only actively started to solicit his re-entry into the diplomatic career in early November 1918. This decision was probably facilitated by the imminent end of the war and, of equal importance, his regaining the King's favour. While Albert's influence over Belgian foreign policy making had diminished throughout the last year of the war and more sizeably after the armistice, he still held a lot of moral authority over the members of the Belgian diplomatic corps. Senior diplomats indeed regularly solicited the King's guidelines for their conduct in specific situations, especially where it concerned attitudes towards the high nobility and royalty of Belgium's former enemies.¹⁵⁷⁵ Conversely, Albert still sometimes managed to successfully intervene on behalf of junior diplomats whose entry into the diplomatic career he wished to facilitate.¹⁵⁷⁶ Beyens will have hoped that the King's favour would at one point help him to pursue his diplomatic career. The diplomat also hoped that the war's end would incite the Foreign Minister to revoke the diplomatic appointments made during the war, which were regarded as temporary, and offer him the legation in Paris or that in London. These were the only ones a diplomat with his career path could honourably accept, Beyens found. "Retirement is more dignified than a secondary posting," he wrote to his wife. However, again Hymans only offered him a minor, temporary assignment and wrote him a

¹⁵⁷⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 23, Paul Hymans to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 6 and 10 July 1918; Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul Hymans, 12 and 14 July 1918; ARA, I 252/01, "Notulen van de Ministerraad", 7 February 1918.

¹⁵⁷⁵ 1909-1914 and 1919-1934, n° 108, Guillaume d'Arschot-Schoonhoven to Fernand Peltzer, 16 July and 14 December 1920; Guillaume d'Arschot-Schoonhoven to Paul Hymans, 6 August 1920; Fernand Peltzer to Guillaume d'Arschot-Schoonhoven, 9 December 1920.

¹⁵⁷⁶ AMBZ, PF 2353, "Eugène de Ligne", Harry Jungbluth to Paul Hylans, 15 and 22 May 1918; Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy to Harry Jungbluth, 13 May 1918.

letter of recommendation for the investment company *Société Générale*. The latter gesture was quite unequivocal. Yet Beyens did not give up hope.¹⁵⁷⁷

His persistence seemed to yield in early July 1919 when the Council of Ministers decided to appoint Beyens as Belgian representative in the Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission, an organ which had its seat in Koblenz and was created by the Treaty of Versailles to supervise the occupation of the German Rhineland.¹⁵⁷⁸ Costermans, one of Beyens's friends at the Foreign Ministry declared him to be "saved at last". He added that "the press that dislikes him, has revealed its spite with a few venomous allusions, but I do not believe it will succeed in undoing what has been done."¹⁵⁷⁹ Although Costermans denied that press campaigns would alter the decision taken by the Council of Ministers, his words actually reveal that he did acknowledge the influence of journalists and newspaper editors on diplomatic appointments. Now that the public had allegedly become interested in the country's foreign policy, it could be expected that Belgian politicians did not want to take decisions which threatened to meet with the displeasure of part of the electorate.

The decision to appoint Beyens as High Commissioner indeed greatly displeased the many nationalist journalists who loathed the former Foreign Minister for his refusal during the war to work towards annexations of Dutch territory. As his greatest enemy, Beyens identified Edmond Patris of *Le Soir*. If Bassompierre is to be believed, Beyens's last encounter with Patris, in July 1917, did not end friendly. "You are an insolent," the diplomat had shouted to Patris when the latter had refused to greet him. The journalist had replied that "I salute whom I like and I do not like to salute someone who has so badly served the interests of the country." To this Patris added that "in any case, we will soon have the pleasure of not seeing you anymore."¹⁵⁸⁰ After the editors of *Le Soir* had resumed publication in late 1918, Patris occasionally reminded his readers of his opinions about Beyens.¹⁵⁸¹ When news got out of the diplomat's appointment in the Rhineland, however, the political editor of *Le Soir* intensified his campaign against him. In several articles, Patris argued that like many of his colleagues,

¹⁵⁷⁷ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 70, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 7 November and 3 December 1918; and n° 65, Journal 'Mon Ambassade à Rome', 1, 1921, Introduction. See also ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 27 March 1919.

¹⁵⁷⁸ ARA, I 252/01, "Notulen van de Ministerraad", 4 July 1919. On the Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission, see PAWLEY, Margaret, *The Watch on the Rhine: The Military Occupation of the Rhineland, 1918-1930*, London and New York, 2007.

¹⁵⁷⁹ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 178, Henri Costermans to Léon van der Elst, 9 July 1919.

¹⁵⁸⁰ SOMA, AB 2515, "Dagboek baron Albert de Bassompierre, 1914-1919-1940-1941", 13 July 1917.

¹⁵⁸¹ See for instance PATRIS, Edmond, "Notre corps diplomatique. Une réforme indispensable", *Le Soir*, 28 December 1918.

he too had been “astonished” to learn about the appointment of “the symbol of a superseded policy which was condemned by the country.” He added that Beyens had not yet accepted the posting and would probably refrain from accepting because of “the opposition which has manifested itself in the public and even in the Council [of Ministers] which has appointed him.”¹⁵⁸² The article was clearly a public appeal to Beyens not to accept the posting because he had allegedly served the country so badly during the war. While in the Council of Ministers no one had opposed the choice of Beyens, the opposition that Patris perceived in the public referred to a few articles written by nationalist journalists like himself. Their writings alone would certainly not induce Beyens to decline the job offer.

After more than a week, the press attacks on Beyens had still not waned. Although the diplomat declared to his wife that “these attacks leave me very cold,” she would probably not have believed that. Beyens explained that the “furious” written assaults came from the *Comité de Politique Nationale* and its newspapers, among which he ranked “*Le Soir* and some provincial rags.” In “venomous snippets”, he added, “Patris and his provincial acolytes” had cut pieces out of his reports from Berlin and attributed meanings to them that these reports did not have. In this way, he believed, they wanted to depict him as an enemy of France, with whose representatives the diplomat would have to work in the Rhineland. Worse was, Beyens continued, that several parliamentarians – he named Destrée as one of these – had addressed Hymans in a similar way. Although the Foreign Minister had assured him that his nomination would not be revoked and asked him to write a note for use in his reply to Destrée, Beyens feared that the Council of Ministers would succumb to “the pressure of a few newspapers.” He believed that if the attacks persisted, the Council would try to persuade the French government not to accept him as High Commissioner. The diplomat told his wife that he now regretted that he had to solicit the posting, exclaiming that “if only we could do without, what a pleasure it would be not to have to deal with that canaille.” Surely, Beyens did not regard all journalists as such. He even considered approaching Alfred Madoux, the editor of the Brussels Liberal newspaper *L'Étoile belge*, which generally put diplomats of presumably Liberal persuasion in a favourable light.¹⁵⁸³

The very next day, Beyens had to find that “the campaign of Patris and his provincial acolytes” continued. The diplomat had indeed read an article entitled “Une nomination regrettable: M. Beijens-Oppenheim” and published in *L'Action Nationale*. Its lecture had

¹⁵⁸² ANONYMOUS, “Petite Gazette. Notre haut-commissaire sur le Rhin”, *Le Soir*, 7 July 1919. See also ANONYMOUS, “Notre représentation diplomatique à Berlin”, *Le Soir*, 12 July 1919.

¹⁵⁸³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 70, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 12 July 1919.

utterly displeased him: “We are treated as Jewish-Boches. That is ignoble. One wants to make believe that I am a Dutch Jew, a stranger to the country [...] The calumnies of Patris have not touched me, but when one attacks my old sweetheart it hurts me. It is definitely impossible to serve a country where such infamies are freely printed and spread.”¹⁵⁸⁴

The attacks published in *L'Action nationale*'s 12 July 1919 editorial were arguably the most personal a Belgian diplomat had to read until then. The journalist Z. gave his readers an overview of Beyens's activities since his appointment in Berlin seven years earlier. Changing the spelling of his name to make it seem Dutch and adding the name of his wife, who was of Jewish-German descent, Z argued that the diplomat's origins and those of his wife should have sufficed to render him unfit for a posting in the German capital. Nonetheless, the journalist acknowledged, “how difficult it be, there is a possibility that a man escapes the laws of his blood and serves with intelligence and loyalty a country which is not his fatherland.” However, he opposed, this was not true in Beyens's case. Z then drew up a catalogue of accusations which listed “Dutchomania” and “Germanophilia” in addition to more general reproaches to Belgian diplomats such as incompetence and ignorance of economic issues. Referring to the end of Beyens's Foreign Ministership, the journalist claimed that “finally the public got worried” and “the man who for three years had aroused the suspicions of our Friends, protected our competitors and humoured our enemies, leaving us to ruin ourselves, to suffer and to bleed [...] had to leave his posting.” However, he added, Beyens only left the Foreign Ministry after gratefully accepting “hyperbolic congratulations” from his colleagues. Z deemed this attitude as “so typical of the natural impudence and exorbitance of the Jewish Boches.” After having repeated the annexationist foreign policy program and listed the qualities which a truly national Belgian representative needed to possess, the journalist incited his readers to revolt against Beyens's nomination in the Rhineland.¹⁵⁸⁵

Z's article contained several similarities with Neuray's attack on Fallon. Both journalists resorted to organic imagery to accuse these two senior diplomats of not having properly defended the country's interests, most notably by obstructing the plans of Belgian annexationists with regards to the Netherlands. Both also claimed to speak for the entire nation. Unlike Neuray, however, Z used discourse strategies of ‘othering’ to render Beyens distant, to alienate him from the national community.¹⁵⁸⁶ By claiming that Beyens had

¹⁵⁸⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 70, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 13 July 1919.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Z., “Une nomination regrettable. M. Beijens-Oppenheim”, *L'Action Nationale*, 12 July 1919.

¹⁵⁸⁶ See COUPLAND, Nikolas, “‘Other’ representation”, in JASPERS, Jürgen, Jan-Ola ÖSTMAN and Jef VERSCHUEREN (eds.), *Society and Language Use*, Handbook of Pragmatics Highlights 7, Amsterdam, 2010, 241-248.

German, Dutch and Jewish blood running through his veins, the journalist moreover suggested that the diplomat was a born enemy of the Belgian nation. While the Belgian nationalists' enmity towards the Germans and the Dutch was a direct consequence of the First World War, their anti-Semitism sprung from the idea that the Jews ranked among the domestic enemies of the Belgian nation. Belgian nationalists believed that Jewish people had formed an 'International' which ruled the countries of the world behind the scenes. Especially from the 1920s onwards, Belgian politicians of Jewish descent were regularly reprehended in nationalist media for their alleged lack of loyalty towards the Belgian nation. Louis Franck, for instance, was called "the minister with his beautiful Jewish beard" who rather than Belgium seemed to serve the Netherlands, "after Jerusalem his only real Fatherland."¹⁵⁸⁷ Z accused Beyens of the same 'un-Belgian' attitude because the diplomat allegedly held a similar combination of loyalties towards the Belgian nation's enemies. For some nationalist journalists, diplomats like Jews indeed constituted a cosmopolitan International and were therefore deeply mistrusted.¹⁵⁸⁸

In the many letters he wrote to his wife in July 1919, Beyens was constantly alternating expressions of indifference with written sentiments of pugnacity. So too the morning after he had read Z's article. He "took his best pen" to write the reply to the nationalist parliamentarians that Hymans had asked for. Now it was up to the government to decide whether or not "to disdain these low calumnies and appoint me as the right man for the functions of High Commissioner." Moreover, he wrote a few days later, "the press campaign is nothing much really, given the meagre value of the journalists, and if wanted the government could stop the campaign of *Le Soir*."¹⁵⁸⁹ However, as the 'if wanted' passage indicates, Beyens doubted more and more that the members of the government would continue to support him. He had probably read that morning's editorial in *L'Action Nationale*, where a certain 'Totus' had repeated and expanded the nationalists' allegations against him but at the same time had repeatedly urged Prime Minister Delacroix "to beware" because "there is a storm brewing everywhere" and "not more than one drop is needed to make the cup run over."¹⁵⁹⁰

¹⁵⁸⁷ SAERENS, Lieven, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad*, 235-241.

¹⁵⁸⁸ See also ANONYMOUS, "Echos. Nos diplomates", *La Nation belge*, 17 February 1920. See also my review of the book of Bertrand Herremans, who rather unconvincingly argues that in the 1920s anti-Semitism pervaded the Belgian diplomatic corps: AUWERS, Michael, "Bertrand Herremans, Entre terreur rouge et peste brune, la Belgique livide (1918-1940). La diplomatie belge face aux Juifs et aux antisémites, Brussel, André Versailles éditeur, 2012", *Mededelingenblad van de Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 35/3, 2013, 20-22.

¹⁵⁸⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 70, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 13 and 15 July 1919.

¹⁵⁹⁰ TOTUS, "Le Ministre de la défaite", *L'Action Nationale*, 15 July 1919.

Beyens indeed deemed politicians very susceptible to succumb to the pressure of the media. As such, he was happy to note that two weeks after his nomination the press campaign more or less subsided. The many supportive conversations he had since engaged in moreover strengthened him in his conviction that “not everyone thinks about me like Patris does.” Nevertheless, Beyens also noticed that Hymans carefully avoided talking to him about the Rhineland commission. The diplomat again suspected the Foreign Minister of trying to avoid further criticisms from the nationalist press by making absolutely sure that the French government supported his candidature. The least objection, tactical if it were, would then suffice to put him aside. Beyens received another indication when he was not invited to even one of the dinners at the occasion of the French President’s visit to Brussels. It was clear to him: Hymans would find an excuse to incite him to renounce the posting in the Rhineland, and this excuse would be “that I am a too great personality for the posting.” If the Foreign Minister would claim that the objection came from Paris, Beyens declared, he would reply that surely it must have come from Hymans’s “friends at the Hotel Lotti.”¹⁵⁹¹ Since this was the place in Paris where Hymans during the peace conference regularly discussed with Orts and Bassompierre, the diplomat had clearly not forgotten which functionaries had helped Broqueville and Renkin to push him aside.

As Beyens wrote to his wife a few days later, his predictions had materialized. Consequently, he lost all confidence in his Foreign Minister. Instead of saying “I will defend you if you are attacked and the government will not revoke your appointment”, Beyens complained, Hymans had let his “fear of journalists” prevail. Beyens learnt from Gaiffier that the French government had no objection whatsoever against his candidature and that Hymans was just afraid to be attacked himself. “All this disgusts me,” Beyens concluded, “and one can certainly not serve a country which is governed by people who tremble before a few journalists.” That evening, the diplomat could read in *Le Soir* that he had declined the posting of High Commissioner of the Rhineland. No comments were made.¹⁵⁹²

On Christmas Day 1919, Beyens wrote to Van der Elst that “here comes the end of a year which has been bad for both of us.” He explained that “it is hard [...] to be covered with insults and calumnies without being allowed to reply.” Beyens concluded on a sentimental note, expressing the hope “that this communion in injustice and sadness, my dear Léon, will bring us even closer together and strengthen our friendship, which for me is a great

¹⁵⁹¹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 70, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 18, 21, 22 and 23 July 1919.

¹⁵⁹² AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 70, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 25, 27, 29 and 31 July 1919.

consolation.”¹⁵⁹³ For Van der Elst, in some respects the year after the armistice had transpired in a similar way. At the time when Beyens was forced to renounce the job that would have allowed him to pursue his diplomatic career, Van der Elst decided to leave the Belgian legation in Madrid. In a letter to former Foreign Minister Paul de Favereau, he wrote that he had requested Hymans “to set me free”.¹⁵⁹⁴ A press campaign directed against him clearly influenced this decision.

Like in the case of Beyens, Patris was its instigator. In a December 1918 article in which he had accused Beyens of a pro-German attitude, the political editor of *Le Soir* charged Van der Elst with imposing such attitude on all Belgian diplomats. Moreover, Patris reminded his readers of the German publication of the Belgian diplomatic documents in 1915 and held Van der Elst responsible for the whole affair.¹⁵⁹⁵ Probably because the journalist had included these accusations in a very extensive article which primarily dealt with the reorganisation of the diplomatic career, they did not meet with much response at the time. However, a few months later journalists of the weeklies *L’Horizon* and *L’Eventail* repeated the charges. While the article in *L’Horizon* was rather suggestive, the one in *L’Eventail* was very explicit. Its author wrote an overview of Van der Elst’s career, presenting it as a string of “the worst insanities” and other “stupidities”. He argued that these blunders had earned “this immense Germanophile” first ennoblement and later on several promotions of nobility. Referring to the diplomatic documents, the journalist claimed that Van der Elst had “provided the enemy with weapons that it would use in a terrible way.” Van der Elst’s negligence, he added, had led to his removal from Le Havre. A few days after its publication in *L’Eventail*, the editors of *Le Soir* reprinted the article. Publication in the country’s most widely read newspaper certainly increased the effect it had on Van der Elst.¹⁵⁹⁶

In a letter to his former secretary Costermans, Van der Elst confided that he could never have imagined “that people were so evil.” Yet given that annexationist journals had already formulated similar accusations during the war, he could have predicted that these people and their friends would not just have abandoned their charges after the armistice had put an end to government censorship. Remarkably enough, Van der Elst did not immediately make this connection. Rather, he attributed the accusations to “one or another nobleman” who

¹⁵⁹³ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 25 December 1919.

¹⁵⁹⁴ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 176, Léon van der Elst to Paul de Favereau, 25 July 1919.

¹⁵⁹⁵ PATRIS, Edmond, “Notre corps diplomatique. Une réforme indispensable”, *Le Soir*, 28 December 1918.

¹⁵⁹⁶ ANONYMOUS, “Autres pays, autres moeurs”, *L’Eventail*, 16 March 1919; ANONYMOUS, “Echos”, *L’Horizon politique, économique, littéraire et colonial*, 15 March 1919; ANONYMOUS, “À propos de la reddition d’Anvers”, *Le Soir*, 19 March 1919.

had taken offense at the latest promotion of his noble status. Although he would have preferred not to react because establishing his own innocence would inevitably expose others, he wrote, “honour” compelled him to take his own defence. Van der Elst therefore urged Costermans to ask Hymans to set up a parliamentary fact-finding committee. He also sent a plea for his innocence directly to the Foreign Minister.¹⁵⁹⁷

After having pointed out to Van der Elst that not some nobleman but rather his annexationist enemies were behind the press campaign, Costermans agreed that this was the best way to go. “If tomorrow, the mob [the nationalist press] finds an MP prepared to serve as its echo in the Chamber,” he wrote, “you risk to be defended in a weak and incomplete manner.” Conversely, he believed, a parliamentary committee would certainly establish Van der Elst’s innocence and “confuse” his adversaries. Costermans was also aware that Van der Elst might not have deemed it honourable to put in motion a process which, since someone had to take the blame, would inevitably lead to establishing the guilt of one of his fellow functionaries. The times have changed, Costermans opposed, and one has to adapt to them. “An overly courteous attitude would turn you into the victim of the affair”, he added, explaining that “the masses only know what the newspapers print and one has to reckon with that.”¹⁵⁹⁸ Costermans also made clear to Hymans that Van der Elst had absolutely nothing to do with the matter. As Political Director at the time the war broke out, Gaiffier carried the actual responsibility for leaving the documents behind. Contrary to the intentions expressed in his letter to Van der Elst, however, Costermans did not plead for the establishment of a parliamentary committee. He did transmit Van der Elst’s request and also indicated how such a committee should proceed, but devoted more attention to stressing the inconveniences of the initiative. Rather, Costermans argued, “M. Patris should be notified about his mistake and engaged to loyally recognize this by publishing a rectification in his newspaper.”¹⁵⁹⁹

Costermans had also provided Hymans with the draft of an answer the Foreign Minister could send to Van der Elst. However, Hymans chose not to use the suggested formulation but instead gave Van der Elst the same advice as he had given Fallon. His long-time experience in the limelight, Hymans wrote, had told him that “public men need to have some philosophy and resign themselves to the sometimes inconsiderate or unjust criticisms of

¹⁵⁹⁷ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 188, Léon van der Elst to Henri Costermans, 28 March 1919; AMBZ, Classement B 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Léon van der Elst to Henri Costermans, 28 March 1919.

¹⁵⁹⁸ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 188, Henri Costermans to Léon van der Elst, s.d. [early April 1919].

¹⁵⁹⁹ AMBZ, Classement B 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Henri Costermans to Paul Hymans, 9 April 1919.

newspapers.” Above all, the Foreign Minister thought it was best to avoid further press polemics.¹⁶⁰⁰

Van der Elst disagreed and still wished that a parliamentary fact-finding committee would be established. He therefore contacted his friend Favereau, then president of the Senate, and his cousin Count Arnold t’Kint de Roodenbeke, one of the Senate’s senior members. The former Secretary-General had the ambition to conclude his diplomatic career at a more prestigious posting closer to Brussels and this, he believed, necessitated exculpation from the charges Patris and his like-minded friends had cast on him. It took considerable efforts from Favereau and t’Kint to dissuade Van der Elst from doing so. Both argued that in the social circles in which they moved virtually no one cared, let alone talked about the articles and that the “evil worm”, as t’Kint referred to Patris, had thus missed his target. With regards to Van der Elst’s ambitions, Favereau was less optimistic. The former Foreign Minister stated that if he was to put his friendship for Van der Elst aside, he could only conclude that the latter would not obtain the posting he desired without an intervention from very high. However, if Van der Elst deemed it inappropriate to appeal to the King, as Favereau seemed to suggest, it was probably better for him to leave the diplomatic career.¹⁶⁰¹

As we have seen, Van der Elst eventually followed Favereau’s advice. Letting a few months pass after the last accusatory article had appeared, the diplomat asked Hymans for his resignation, stating that “I dare say, with some pride, that I have always remained unswervingly loyal to the cult of duty and that not one deed of my life leaves me with remorse or regret.”¹⁶⁰² Given that a campaign in the nationalist press had contributed to thwarting his aspirations to a more honourable career end, these words were not spoken without any bitterness.¹⁶⁰³

Of course, this overview of how nationalist journalists and publicists wrote about individual Belgian diplomats would not be very representative without pointing out that there were also members of the Belgian diplomatic corps who received favourable press coverage from these writers. One such favourite was the moderately annexationist prince Albert de

¹⁶⁰⁰ AMBZ, Classement B 72/1, “Mobilisation”, Paul Hymans to Léon van der Elst, 15 April 1919. See also the letter in which Costermans informed Van der Elst of the changes Hymans had made, in ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 188, Henri Costermans to Léon van der Elst, 16 April 1919.

¹⁶⁰¹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 188, Léon van der Elst to Arnold t’Kint de Roodenbeke, 1 April 1919; Arnold t’Kint de Roodenbeke to Léon van der Elst, 5 April 1919; and in the same archive n° 180, Paul de Favereau to Léon van der Elst, 12 May 1919.

¹⁶⁰² AMBZ, PF 347, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, Léon van der Elst to Paul Hymans, 28 August 1919.

¹⁶⁰³ As Beyens noted, after leaving Madrid Van der Elst was “inconsolable not to play a part any more [...] and not having been offered anything.” The former Secretary-General apparently felt this was “the pinnacle of ingratitude” after all the services he had rendered. See AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 70, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 6 November 1919.

Ligne, whom a journalist of *Le Soir* praised for his amiability, his grace, and his unpretentiousness.¹⁶⁰⁴ In other words: Ligne was not your average cosmopolitan aristocrat but truly a part of the Belgian nation. Another one was the somewhat less moderately annexationist Gustave Guillaume, whom a contributor to *Le Soir* called “one of our finest diplomats”, arguably because the diplomat was expected to attach great importance to the settlement of “our dispute with Holland.”¹⁶⁰⁵

The absolute diplomatic hero of the Belgian nationalist press was Pierre Orts. In a late March 1919 edition of *Le Soir*, Piérard narrated about his encounter in Paris with the Counsellor, a reference to Orts’s temporary functions as advisor to the Belgian delegation at the peace conference. The Socialist dissident described him as “a diplomat, but one who is very different – thank God! – from old style, pusillanimous diplomats who are full of dangerous reticence and whose polished manners and calculated language [...] dissimulate their thoughts.” The advisor, by contrast, was “all frankness” and had “no fear of his shadow.” After further glorifications which stressed Orts’s great energy, his vigilant and perspicacious patriotism, and his detachment of partisan politics, Piérard assured his readers that this diplomat could “render Belgium the most precious services at this decisive turning point of its history.”¹⁶⁰⁶

Given the large part Orts had played in the ousting of Broqueville, Fernand Neuray was not really inclined to publish a similar article in *La Nation belge*. However, Louis Dumont-Wilden, one of the principal contributors to Neuray’s newspaper, published in his weekly *Pourquoi Pas?* a eulogy of Orts’s virtues as a diplomat and a patriot. In constructing his article, Dumont-Wilden seems to have copied Piérard’s structure and methodology: first he drew a very negative picture of traditional diplomats as “mysterious” and “self-effacing” men who said nothing and did nothing, and then he attributed the opposite characteristics to Orts. Moreover, if Dumont-Wilden were to be believed, Orts was not only the opposite of traditional diplomats but also of politicians. Orts, Dumont-Wilden argued, was consistent and strong: “He has nothing of that smiling nice guy image which determines the success of ministers, parliaments and diplomats with journalists [...] Orts will never say ‘Amen!’ to anyone, not even to his minister, not even to his friend. He has his ideas and he keeps to them: that is a strength, even in diplomacy.”¹⁶⁰⁷ It seems that Orts truly incarnated the energy and

¹⁶⁰⁴ ANONYMOUS, “Dans la diplomatie”, *Le Soir*, 5 October 1919.

¹⁶⁰⁵ ANONYMOUS, “Le Nouveau Ministère”, *Le Soir*, 22 November 1920; ANONYMOUS, “La Petite Gazette. Aux affaires étrangères”, *Le Soir*, 26 November 1920.

¹⁶⁰⁶ PIÉRARD, Louis, “Parmi les hommes. Les revendications de la Belgique”, *Le Soir*, 31 March 1919.

¹⁶⁰⁷ DUMONT-WILDEN, Louis, “M. Pierre Orts”, *Pourquoi Pas?*, 9, 277, 21 November 1919, 787-788.

the initiative expected from the men whom the nation needed to promote its foreign policy interests.

Evaluating the framing of Belgian diplomats in the country's newspapers of the immediate afterwar, perceptions seem to have been determined not only by the proximity of the foreign policy views of journalists and publicists on the one hand and diplomats on the other hand but also by the degree of access that journalists and publicists had to the members of the diplomatic corps. In times when nationalist ideas had gained ground in both government and Foreign Ministry circles, journalists such as Neuray and Patris had no difficulties keeping themselves well informed about the doings of Belgian diplomats. This was especially so because they had happened to dwell in the vicinity of government members and Foreign Ministry officials during the war and had thus formed alliances with these men which suited them well in the immediate afterwar. Conversely, most journalists and publicists of the partisan press had spent the war in the Netherlands or in occupied Belgium and had never had as frequent and close contact with the men in charge of Belgian foreign policy-making. This explains why they far less frequently reported on the past and present activities of Belgian diplomats.

§ 2. Published Opinion and the Reforms of the Belgian Diplomatic Career

In the months after the armistice, Jules Destrée felt confident that his brief experience as a diplomat had enabled him to detect the flaws of the Belgian diplomatic career and to “sketch out an entire program” to render it more effective. “I had wished to explain all that, and the etcetera’s during the discussion of the Foreign Affairs budget,” Destrée argued in an article published in *Le Peuple* in October 1919. However, he regretted, “there has not been a discussion of this budget.”¹⁶⁰⁸ The words of Destrée confirm the findings of Peter Van Kemseke, who claims in a study of Dutch parliamentary debates on diplomatic representation in the afterwar period that there were virtually no similar discussions in Belgian parliament.¹⁶⁰⁹ This is basically true. With the exception of a few interventions in 1920, speakers in the Belgian Chamber and Senate devoted very little attention to the organisation

¹⁶⁰⁸ DESTRÉE, Jules, “La Belgique et le monde”, *Le Peuple*, 12 October 1919.

¹⁶⁰⁹ VAN KEMSEKE, Peter, “De diplomatieke anomalie. ‘Een aristocratische vogel in het democratische hoenderhok’”, in Henk DE SMAELE and Jo TOLLEBEEK (eds.), *Politieke representatie*, Leuven, 2002, 295-309.

of the diplomatic career.¹⁶¹⁰ Yet Bassompierre, who as Political Director was largely responsible for the reforms of the career which led to the Royal Decree of 15 July 1920, claimed that the changes were made “to satisfy the manifest wishes of public opinion.”¹⁶¹¹ However, Bassompierre did not specify the opinion of which public he wished to satisfy. The following pages first investigate those opinions published in several of Belgium’s most widely read newspapers, and then looks into how they were translated in the new Organic Law of the Diplomatic Corps.

The Partisan Press

From the time of the armistice until the Summer of 1920, the editors of most identifiably Catholic, Liberal, and Socialist Belgian newspapers devoted fairly little attention to the organization of the country’s diplomatic career. Arguably, in this period journalists of *Gazet van Antwerpen* and *Vooruit* did not care too much about that.¹⁶¹² The editors of *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *La Libre Belgique* each published only one small article about the matter. Both these pieces dealt with the rise of diplomats’ salaries in May 1919.¹⁶¹³ While the journalist of *La Libre Belgique* did no more than expressing his hope that Belgian diplomats would be worth their salary, his colleague of *Het Laatste Nieuws* merely commented “that’s quite something!”, thus implicitly conveying a similar message.¹⁶¹⁴

As we have seen, the editors of *La Dernière Heure* had published some criticisms of Belgian pre-war diplomats. Yet these negative perceptions did not incite them to formulate recommendations to render the country’s diplomatic representation more effective. However, they did publish an elaborate interview with Charles Bastin. This Belgian consul-general had served the country for more than twenty-years in several overseas destinations and was appointed by Hymans to reside in a commission for the reform of the consular career.¹⁶¹⁵ Much more than reforms of the diplomatic career, the reorganisation of the consular corps was indeed of the order of the day. Members of the highest Belgian political circles had become more and more convinced that in the afterwar period foreign policy would be

¹⁶¹⁰ See PHK, 10 and 11 June 1920, 1521-1533 and 1574-1599.

¹⁶¹¹ AMBZ, 12.937, “Réorganisation des corps diplomatiques et consulaires”, Note of Direction P, s.d. [June 1920]

¹⁶¹² I have not found a single comment on the organisation of the Belgian diplomatic career in the 1918, 1919 and 1920 editions of these newspapers.

¹⁶¹³ This raise would be adopted by the Chamber and the Senate in October 1919. See PHK, 1 October 1919, 1541-1546; PHS, 7 October 1919, 703-709.

¹⁶¹⁴ ANONYMOUS, “Les traitements des diplomates”, *La Libre Belgique*, 29 May 1919; ANONYMOUS, “Kronijk van den dag. Duurtebijslag voor onze diplomaten”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 10 June 1919.

¹⁶¹⁵ See ADCB, 1925, 186.

dominated by a new race for economic expansion through commercial and industrial competition between states, and that more than Belgian diplomats, the country's consuls had to be prepared to successfully engage in this struggle.¹⁶¹⁶ Many consuls wished to benefit from the renewed importance of their role to achieve their long-time dream of equality with diplomats. So did Bastin. The interviewer of *La Dernière Heure* allowed him to stress that Belgian legations disposed of numerous personnel while consulates always had a shortage. As the war had shown, Bastin argued, diplomats did no more than obeying instructions given by the central power. Consuls, by contrast, had "to show initiative." The journalist deduced from Bastin's implicit criticism of the diplomats' lack of energy that he asked that consuls would be put on an equal footing with diplomats. Bastin replied that this was the unanimous wish of his colleagues. He stated that they all wanted that the ranks of the consular career had their equivalent in the diplomatic career so that soon both careers could merge and that also they could become ministers. Bastin supported this old demand by arguing that consuls possessed far greater democratic legitimacy than diplomats. "One could not reproach us with the cutting criticism made to diplomacy, which draws our political information from a single class, and not even from an interesting one," he claimed. Rather, Bastin explained, "our more democratic acquaintances enable us to inform ourselves better."¹⁶¹⁷

Frans van Cauwelaert certainly shared these concerns for Belgium's economic relations. Yet he was thinking more in the direction of adding commercial attachés to the country's legations. These men, the Catholic MP wrote in *De Standaard*, should be recruited from commercial milieus and should assist and sometimes even replace Belgian diplomats in economic negotiations. Bastin and his colleagues would probably not have liked to read that Van Cauwelaert felt that these attachés should be hierarchically superior to Belgian consuls but inferior to the country's diplomats. The director of *De Standaard* indeed did not wish to revolutionize the Belgian diplomatic career. On the one hand, he acknowledged that in the future diplomats would have to meet higher requirements and that access to the diplomatic career should be widened in order to not only allow "the child with the golden blazon" in but also "the son of the people." The parliamentarian also revived an old demand of the Flemish Movement, pointing to the fact that not even at the Belgian legation in The Hague a single diplomat mastered the Dutch or Flemish language. On the other hand, however, Van Cauwelaert believed that reforms of the diplomatic career could not be executed without a

¹⁶¹⁶ ROOSENS, *Agents diplomatiques*, 74.

¹⁶¹⁷ ANONYMOUS, "Pourquoi nos consuls de carrière ne seraient-ils pas les égaux de nos diplomates?", *La Dernière Heure*, 5 May 1919.

period of transition because, so he argued, “we do not fancy the risky appointment of occasional diplomats all that much, especially when they have been too strongly drenched with the stubborn drinks of our domestic professional politics.” He explained that “the haphazard experiments performed with this system during the war were not such that they have to be multiplied.”¹⁶¹⁸

These statements suggest that Van Cauwelaert clearly sided with the older members of the Belgian diplomatic corps, several of whom had felt threatened by the ambitions of politicians and some of whose careers had ended on a bad note, allegedly because of those same ambitions. Most likely, however, more than pleasing his objective allies, Van Cauwelaert wished to criticize the diplomatic appointments of two of his fiercest political enemies. Anti-Flemish and annexationist, Liberal and Socialist, Hymans and Destrée were indeed many things that Van Cauwelaert was not.

As noted earlier, Destrée himself also had some recommendations for the organisation of the Belgian diplomatic career. Understandably, these differed in several ways from the opinions expressed by Van Cauwelaert. Remarkably enough, however, in *Le Peuple* Destrée limited himself to summarizing his reform “program” in generalizing terms. What should be done, according to the Socialist MP, was to “transform our diplomacy and give it the audacity, the energy, and the initiative that it lacks, render it more attentive to the economic aspect of events, and attach it more closely to the mother country.”¹⁶¹⁹ Focusing on the vitality required of representatives of a growing nation, on economic expansion as one of the nation’s nutrients and on a close unity between the nation and its exteriorization across the borders, Destrée’s summary seemed to contain the major nationalist ideas about diplomatic representation. It should come as no surprise that the parliamentarian developed these ideas in *Le Soir* rather than in the Socialist press organ. The editors of *Le Peuple* indeed seemed to be more concerned with the absence of proletarians in the diplomatic corps and with the continuing aristocratic bias in the recruitment of new diplomats.¹⁶²⁰

The Nationalist Press

Contrary to journalists and editors of the partisan press, their colleagues of nationalist newspapers and reviews published far more articles about the organisation of the Belgian

¹⁶¹⁸ VAN CAUWELAERT, Frans, “Onze diplomatieke vertegenwoordiging. Handelsattachés.”, *De Standaard*, 24 December 1918.

¹⁶¹⁹ DESTRÉE, Jules, “La Belgique et le monde”, *Le Peuple*, 12 October 1919.

¹⁶²⁰ See COURFRAYAC, “Au Fil des Jours. Les Ascendants”, *Le Peuple*, 12 May 1919; ANONYMOUS, “Les Attachés de Légation,” *Le Peuple*, 8 January 1920.

diplomatic career. The editors of *Le Soir* were the absolute champions with about a dozen pleas for reform filling the columns of their newspaper in the year after the armistice. Most of these were written by Patris, who often wrapped attacks on the diplomats that he loathed in opinion pieces which were seemingly intended to indict the diplomatic corps as a whole rather than these individual diplomats.¹⁶²¹

His first elaborate article on the matter was filled for two-thirds with accusations of Germanophile sentiments addressed at individual Belgian diplomats. “Since 1915,” Patris argued, “our compatriots have been able to read in what the Germans have called the *Belgische Aktenstücken* [...] that not only baron Greindl and his successor M. Beyens but also M. Degrelle-Rogier, Count de Lalaing and M. Leghait saw international politics through Boches glasses.”¹⁶²² Contrary to at least one journalist of *La Libre Belgique*, who stressed the highly selective and suggestive character of the German publication of the Belgian diplomatic correspondence, nationalist journalists and publicists tended to underline that the edition constituted absolute proof that there had been something very wrong with Belgium’s top diplomats in the years before the war.¹⁶²³ In the first of two opinion pieces on the Belgian diplomatic corps published in *Le Soir* and *La Nation belge* at the same time, Jules Destrée followed almost exactly the same structure as Patris, devoting first two-thirds of the text to the German edition which had proven the “Germanophile spirit” of Belgian diplomats and then one third to how to eliminate this spirit.¹⁶²⁴ To explain how Belgian diplomats had become so pro-German, both Patris and Destrée recurred to an argument which was also partly acknowledged by some diplomats. As we have seen, Beyens had already admitted in a private letter immediately after the publication of the Belgian diplomatic correspondence in the Summer of 1915, that the absence in these documents of anti-German sentiments was largely due to the influence of the then dean of the country’s diplomatic corps, who served in Berlin until 1912. Jules Greindl’s conviction that the German emperor wished to avoid war at all

¹⁶²¹ PATRIS, Edmond, “Petite Gazette. Dans le corps diplomatique”, *Le Soir*, 18 December 1918; PATRIS, Edmond, “Notre corps diplomatique. Une réforme indispensable”, *Le Soir*, 28 December 1918; PATRIS, Edmond, “La réorganisation consulaire”, *Le Soir*, 4 January 1919; PATRIS, Edmond, “Petite Gazette. Notre corps diplomatique”, *Le Soir*, 5 May 1918; PATRIS, Edmond, “Petite Gazette. Notre diplomatie”, *Le Soir*, 28 May 1919; PATRIS, Edmond, “Notre représentation diplomatique à Berlin”, *Le Soir*, 12 July 1919; PATRIS, Edmond, “Petite Gazette. Nos diplomates”, *Le Soir*, 5 August 1919; PATRIS, Edmond, “Dans la carrière”, *Le Soir*, 26 November 1919. See also XXX, “Le recrutement de nos futurs diplomates”, *Le Soir*, 6 July 1919. Patris also commented on the July 1920 reforms of the diplomatic career, see PATRIS, Edmond, “Pour nos diplomates et nos consuls; La réforme dans leur statut”, *Le Soir*, 26 July 1920.

¹⁶²² PATRIS, Edmond, “Notre corps diplomatique. Une réforme indispensable”, *Le Soir*, 28 December 1918.

¹⁶²³ ANONYMOUS, “En Allemagne occupé par les Belges. Après Gladbach”, *La Libre Belgique*, 18 February 1919.

¹⁶²⁴ DESTRÉE, Jules, “Notre diplomatie”, *Le Soir* and *La Nation belge*, 26 July 1919. See also DESTRÉE, Jules, “Aux Affaires Etrangères”, *Le Soir*, 6 September 1919.

costs influenced most of his colleagues because the dean's reports were considered models for the conduct of Belgian diplomacy. As it seemed, Patris and Destrée refused to consider that the build-up to the war and the tragic event itself had altered the opinions of the country's diplomats. According to them, one could never be too sure that the Germanophile spirit was no longer floating in the buildings of Belgian legations.¹⁶²⁵

To remove this spirit and to establish "a national policy", Destrée argued, "this mysterious Ministry of Foreign Affairs needs to be largely aired." Both the Socialist MP and Patris drew primarily on 'traditional' recommendations, which for decades had been appearing in the columns of Belgian newspapers of all denominations. One was the "democratic" necessity of widening the access to the diplomatic career. While Patris argued that "in our egalitarian kingdom" diplomatic agents could no longer be chosen on the basis of their name and their belonging to a certain "caste", Destrée wrote that "we are a small democratic country which has enough nobility in its recent history to permit itself ministers without armorial bearings." Individual qualities rather than high birth, both men agreed, should determine whether or not a candidate could embark upon a diplomatic career. They fully acknowledged that this required increasing diplomats' salaries. "We have to pay our agents so that they can make a good impression and represent Belgium with dignity," Patris stated. "Increase credits, increase representation costs, increase installation costs," the Socialist MP added, exclaiming that "Ah! all this is going to cost a whole lot, no doubt, but all that money will be well spent if [...] one thinks big!" Destrée specified that this thinking big applied especially to economic issues. "In this respect," he argued, "the absurd bulkhead between the diplomatic and consular worlds has to disappear." Destrée explained that "the disdain towards business is of a vanity which no longer belongs to our age." Several of the diplomats' core activities were to help "fill the list of orders of our industrialists, provide work and high salaries to our workers, multiply our enterprises, and increase the activities of our railroads and our harbours."

Patris fully agreed that not only the economic expertise of individual diplomats should be improved but also of the diplomatic corps. In his view, this required merging the diplomatic and consular careers. He even wrote an extensive editorial on the latter topic. In this article, he stressed that already in 1909 the *Conseil supérieur de l'Industrie et du Commerce* had recommended such merger but that nothing had come from it. Patris argued that the top of the Belgian Foreign Ministry could counter the tendency to consider

¹⁶²⁵ PATRIS, Edmond, "Notre corps diplomatique. Une réforme indispensable", *Le Soir*, 28 December 1918; DESTRÉE, Jules, "Notre diplomatie", *Le Soir*, 26 July 1919.

commercial affaires as inferior to political affairs by no longer treating the consular corps like “Cinderella”. Therefore, the journalist of *Le Soir* explained, the Foreign Minister had to create “a single corps of elite agents working under one unique and competent direction.”¹⁶²⁶

For these recommendations to materialize, Hymans and his collaborators would not only have to merge the consular and diplomatic careers but also do the same with the Commercial and Political Directions inside the Foreign Ministry. Such a double merger would moreover facilitate unifying the administrative career with the careers of the foreign service, which was also a request regularly heard before the war.

However, in comparison with the pre-war period the pleas of nationalist journalists and publicists for reforms of the diplomatic career also contained some differences. Most notably, only after the war they gradually started to develop the role of public opinion in the organisation of the Belgian diplomatic corps. Destrée contrasted the regularly invoked pre-war indifference of the Belgian people towards the country’s diplomats with the post-war (and post-neutrality) situation, when “the great test has shown us the importance of our foreign representation, the victorious peace has given us full sovereignty and everyone cares about the projects of our diplomacy.” Destrée even suggested that this new public attention constituted a proper guarantee against the ideological digressions of Belgian diplomats. He indeed argued that before the war the Germanophile spirit had been able to take root in the minds of Belgian diplomats because “contacts between the Belgian people and its diplomats were very weak, only in exceptional cases Parliament and the Press occupied themselves with our foreign policy, and we ignored our ministers as much as they ignored us.”¹⁶²⁷

Other contributors to *Le Soir* insisted that the increase of diplomatic salaries in May 1919 required that “public opinion” had its say about the recruitment and appointment of diplomats. “The country is ready to make the necessary sacrifices to enable its diplomatic representation to meet with the requirements created by its new international status,” a certain XXX had stated a few weeks earlier, arguing that the country could therefore rightfully demand guarantees that the recruitment process of new agents would lead to the entry of only the most qualified candidates into the diplomatic corps. XXX also claimed that “public opinion, henceforth enlightened about the fundamental defaults of our political representation abroad, strongly urges for the systematic renewal of the staff and the redesign of the

¹⁶²⁶ DESTRÉE, Jules, “Notre diplomatie”, *Le Soir*, 26 July 1919; PATRIS, Edmond, “Notre corps diplomatique. Une réforme indispensable”, *Le Soir*, 28 December 1918; PATRIS, Edmond, “La réorganisation consulaire”, *Le Soir*, 4 January 1919.

¹⁶²⁷ DESTRÉE, Jules, “Notre diplomatie”, *Le Soir*, 26 July 1919.

traditional methods which atrophied its efficiency.”¹⁶²⁸ Patris agreed. In an opinion piece published in late November 1919, he used more or less the same wording and added that the increased salaries entitled the Belgians to a diplomatic corps “apt to effectively collaborate to the recovery of the Fatherland.”¹⁶²⁹ Neuray conveyed a similar message in *La Nation belge*. After having exhibited his generational and organic conceptions of Belgian diplomacy by arguing that “our diplomacy needs to be rejuvenated, vivified” and that “Belgium should be represented everywhere by men in the strength of age,” he stated that “it would not be difficult to make clear to the most modest workers and the peasants of the most desolated hamlets that they all have a personal interest in the reorganisation of our diplomacy.”¹⁶³⁰

The above quotations illustrate how the notion of educating the opinion of the nation not only regularly recurred in nationalist publications about Belgian diplomacy, as we have seen, but also in similar writings on the country’s diplomats. Nationalist journalists and publicists clearly believed that the public which expressed this opinion truly cared, or could at least easily be stimulated to care, about the profiles of the men who represented Belgium on the international scene. While Neuray, perhaps somewhat optimistically, discerned such disposition in workers and peasants, Patris seemed to define this aspect of public opinion as primarily bourgeois views of a career which had long been regarded as an aristocratic privilege. Of course, this still allowed him to frame the proposed reforms of the diplomatic career as satisfying the needs of a democratizing society.

The Reorganisation of the Belgian Diplomatic Career

Commenting on the publication of the Royal Decrees of 15 July 1920, which regulated the organisation of the Belgian diplomatic and consular corps, Patris declared that “M. Hymans has successfully carried out a work which was needed for a long time.”¹⁶³¹ The journalist of *Le Soir* was clearly satisfied with the result of what had taken more than two years to prepare. Surely, the reforms were primarily oriented towards rendering the Belgian consular organization more efficient, but Foreign Ministry officials devoted considerable attention to

¹⁶²⁸ XXX, “Le recrutement de nos futurs diplomates”, *Le Soir*, 6 July 1919.

¹⁶²⁹ PATRIS, Edmond, “Dans la carrière”, *Le Soir*, 26 November 1919.

¹⁶³⁰ NEURAY, Fernand, “Un important ‘mouvement’ est annoncé dans notre diplomatie. Il faut pourvoir à une dizaine de postes”, *La Nation belge*, 31 January 1919.

¹⁶³¹ PATRIS, Edmond, “Pour nos diplomates et nos consuls. La réforme dans leur statut”, *Le Soir*, 26 July 1920.

the structure of the country's diplomatic career as well. More than the Foreign Minister, Bassompierre was the architect of this aspect of the changes.¹⁶³²

Patris, who had been friendly with Bassompierre in Le Havre, approvingly noted that the new decree put an end to transitory dispositions which allowed young men who did not possess the required university degrees to nevertheless take part in the diplomatic exam. However, the journalist claimed to fully understand that the temporary measures had been necessary, given that during the war young Belgians had not been able to finish their studies and that recruitment of new diplomats proved to be particularly difficult.¹⁶³³

Although finding new diplomats was not easy indeed, Bassompierre did certainly not just allow anyone in the diplomatic corps. Perhaps the most important criterion to enter the diplomatic career under the exceptional provision was military service. No better way indeed, the Political Director might have figured, to test an aspiring diplomat's patriotism. Already in early February 1918, Bassompierre had advised Hymans to let Henry Borel, who did not have the necessary university degrees, enter the diplomatic corps as an attaché, arguing that it was "evident" that conditions which no man of twenty-three years old could meet would be temporarily removed. The Political Director had been persuaded by the fact that Borel had immediately volunteered in the army after the war had broken out, that he had been quickly promoted to an officer's rank and that he had been injured on duty.¹⁶³⁴ A year later, Bassompierre repeated to Hymans that the young men who had fought for their country during four years, could have used that time to obtain the necessary degrees. That is why, he argued, "their access to the career should be facilitated." The Political Director proposed to lighten the examination syllabus, to allow to the diplomatic exam those attachés whom the war had prevented to finish their university studies, and to exempt from the exam the attachés who did possess the required degrees and had given proof of sufficient diplomatic qualities. After the application of a few minor changes, the Foreign Minister accepted his recommendations.¹⁶³⁵ The young nobleman Ernest Kervyn de Meerendré was one of nine attachés to benefit from the new system. His "services in the army" helped earning him a promotion to the rank of second secretary without having to take part in the diplomatic

¹⁶³² See ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 48, Albert de Bassompierre to Léon van der Elst, 24 May 1918; AMBZ, 12.937, "Réorganisation des corps diplomatiques et consulaires", Note of Direction P, 9, and 15 April, 9 and 20 May, 1 June and 7 July 1920.

¹⁶³³ PATRIS, Edmond, Pour nos diplomates et nos consuls. La réforme dans leur statut", *Le Soir*, 26 July 1920.

¹⁶³⁴ AMBZ, PF 1779, "Henry Borel de Bitche", Note of Direction P, 8 February 1918.

¹⁶³⁵ AMBZ, 13.163, "Question divers", Note of Direction P, 31 March 1919; Procès-verbal de la réunion d ela commission de l'examen diplomatique, 7 June 1919; ROOSENS, "Agents diplomatiques belges", 130-131.

exam.¹⁶³⁶ Conversely, Bassompierre had warned Guy Heyndrickx, who was second secretary when he left the diplomatic career in May 1914 but wanted to re-enter, that because he had not served in the army during the war it was “likely that he would face a delay in his advancement.”¹⁶³⁷

In his opinion piece on the Royal Decrees of 15 July 1920, Patris did not comment on a small addition to one of the articles stipulating the conditions of access to the diplomatic career. Whereas in 1914 this article section still ran “it is necessary [...] to dispose [...] of the personal qualities and aptitudes required to make part of the diplomatic corps”, in the new decree it had been changed into “it is necessary [...] to dispose [...] of the physical aptitudes and personal qualities required [...] The physical aptitudes will be ascertained by a medical examination.”¹⁶³⁸ Claude Roosens suggests that this innovation could have been a consequence of the many complaints of diplomats who claimed to suffer from harsh climates in far-away lands.¹⁶³⁹ Although this might have had an impact on their decision, high-ranking officials at the Foreign Ministry were most likely well aware that such complaints were often used by diplomats to point out how much they were sacrificing for the country and to subtly urge the Political Director and the Foreign Minister not to forget about them at the occasion of the next diplomatic movement. In a way, the addition of physical requirements for entry into the diplomatic career responded to the criticisms uttered in the nationalist press. Journalists writing for these media indeed often denounced the lack of energy and pro-active behaviour in Belgian diplomats. Not seldom, these charges were connected to the necessity to vivify the diplomatic corps. A nationalist himself, Bassompierre would certainly have supported the idea that the growing Belgian nation had a right to have its foreign interests promoted by strong and healthy men.

In his July 1920 opinion piece, Patris did refer to the increase of diplomatic salaries, noting that these were henceforth “sufficient enough” to avoid that only very rich Belgians could embark upon a diplomatic career.¹⁶⁴⁰ As we have seen, the decision to raise the salaries of diplomats had actually already been taken in May 1919 and ratified during the discussions of the Foreign Affairs budget in parliament five months later. We have also seen that Patris and his nationalist colleagues had widely approved of the measure, while journalists of the partisan press had adopted a more sceptical attitude. In the letter to the King which preceded

¹⁶³⁶ AMBZ, PF 1812, “Ernest Kervyn de Meerendré”, Albert de Bassompierre to Ernest Kervyn de Meerendré, 17 May 1919.

¹⁶³⁷ AMBZ, PF 1526, “Guy Heyndrickx”, Note of Direction P, 9 December 1918.

¹⁶³⁸ *Pasinomie*, 1914, n° 208, 25 May 1914, 331; and 1920, n° 426, 15 July 1920, 261.

¹⁶³⁹ ROOSENS, “L'accès à la carrière diplomatique”, 149-150.

¹⁶⁴⁰ PATRIS, Edmond, Pour nos diplomates et nos consuls. La réforme dans leur statut”, *Le Soir*, 26 July 1920.

the publication of the Royal Decree of 15 July 1920, Hymans labelled the “notable increase” of the diplomatic salaries as “one of the principal reforms” and was proud to announce that “lack of fortune is no longer an obstacle which closes the diplomatic career to those capable of rendering services to the country.” The Foreign Minister was also happy to inform the King that funds for representation costs had been increased to the extent that they would allow diplomats “to honourably represent their country, regardless of their personal fortune.” In a similar vein, Hymans added, accommodation expenses would be refunded.¹⁶⁴¹ As such, the Foreign Minister had finally managed to satisfy a crucial demand of – the primarily nationalist – public opinion and had opened the way towards the internal democratization of the Belgian diplomatic corps. That is, of course, if the sums that he would put at the diplomats’ disposition truly corresponded to the expenses they had to make in order to represent Belgium in an ‘honourable’ manner.

Patris devoted most attention to another important reform which Hymans had announced in his letter to the King, namely the rapprochement between the diplomatic and consular services. By means of this initiative, the journalist of *Le Soir* reported with enthusiasm, “the bulkhead between the diplomatic and consular corps is now, if not taken down, than at least greatly thinned.”¹⁶⁴² Patris clearly believed that the current reform constituted an important step towards the merger of the diplomatic and consular careers. However, given that for decades journalists and politicians had pleaded to introduce such a merger, the reforms were rather modest. From Hymans’s letter to the King can be drawn that he had basically taken two measures in this regard. For one, he would call upon diplomats to “temporarily” exercise consular functions and upon consuls to “temporarily” work as “secretaries or advisors” in embassies and legations. As it seemed, the hierarchy between diplomats and consuls was still respected, not only because of the temporary character of the exchange but also via the suggestion that diplomats performing consular functions would lead the consulates that they were sent to while consuls would occupy inferior positions in Belgian legations. However, as the other measure that Hymans adopted reveals, the most meritorious senior consuls would finally receive the possibility to break through the glass ceiling. Consuls who had shown during their career “that they possessed the required qualities to become chiefs of diplomatic missions,” the Foreign Minister wrote, “can be called to exercise these functions and enter permanently in the diplomatic career.”¹⁶⁴³

¹⁶⁴¹ *Pasinomie*, 1920, n° 426, 15 July 1920, 260-261.

¹⁶⁴² PATRIS, Edmond, Pour nos diplomates et nos consuls. La réforme dans leur statut”, *Le Soir*, 26 July 1920.

¹⁶⁴³ *Pasinomie*, 1920, n° 426, 15 July 1920, 261-262.

For many consuls, this was their career-long dream. Already in December 1919, that is more than six months before the decree on the organisation of the diplomatic corps was published, Charles Renoz was the first to achieve his ambitions. Having some difficulties finding a suitable candidate to lead the Belgian legation in Mexico, Hymans offered the posting “with transfer to the diplomatic corps” to Renoz, but on the condition that the latter could reach his destination within a few days.¹⁶⁴⁴ At first, Renoz will probably not have believed what he read. Already in 1910, he had reached what was then the summit for a Belgian consul, namely the posting of minister plenipotentiary (without transfer to the diplomatic corps) in Buenos Aires. During the First World War, he even received “warm congratulations” from Neuray in *Le XXe siècle* for anti-German actions which had “provoked the ire” of a German newspaper. Renoz’s actions, Neuray had argued, proved that he had “defended the Belgian cause well.”¹⁶⁴⁵ However, a conflict during the First World War with the Catholic politician Auguste Mélot, who was then on a propaganda mission in Argentina, led the then Foreign Minister Broqueville to replace Renoz with Mélot. Renoz was sent to the less prestigious posting of Havana. As if that was not enough, he was subjected to fierce attacks from journalists of *La Métropole* and, remarkably enough, *Le XXe siècle*, in whose columns he was now accused of pro-German behaviour.¹⁶⁴⁶ All this explains why Renoz did not need much time to make up his mind. Less than five days after receiving Hymans’s telegram, he was already in Mexico-city. From there he informed the Foreign Minister that he accepted the offer on the condition that he would enter the diplomatic career at the highest rank of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the First Class. Hymans agreed.¹⁶⁴⁷ Over the following six months, two more consuls became full members of the Belgian diplomatic corps.¹⁶⁴⁸

In the preamble to the Royal Decrees of 15 July 1920, Hymans explained that the measure to occasionally allow the most deserving consuls into the diplomatic career would render the consular career more attractive and would stimulate the zeal of both junior diplomats and consuls, who would have to compete for minister postings opening up.¹⁶⁴⁹ Conversely, one could argue, it rendered the diplomatic career less attractive. Junior diplomats would now indeed have to compete with persons from the so-called Cinderella

¹⁶⁴⁴ AMBZ, PF 1169, “Charles Renoz”, Paul Hymans to Charles Renoz, 6 December 1919.

¹⁶⁴⁵ NEURAY, Fernand, “Les pauvres gens !... Encore des Allemands qui crient au martyre !”, *Le XXe siècle*, 12 January 1916.

¹⁶⁴⁶ AMBZ, PF 1169, “Charles Renoz”, Charles Renoz to Paul Hymans, 18 February 1918.

¹⁶⁴⁷ AMBZ, PF 1169, “Charles Renoz”, Charles Renoz to Paul Hymans, 11 December 1919; Paul Hymans to Charles Renoz, 15 December 1919.

¹⁶⁴⁸ ADCB, 1921, 197.

¹⁶⁴⁹ *Pasinomie*, 1920, n° 426, 15 July 1920, 262.

service for a limited number of postings. Would the former not feel that the prestige of the diplomatic corps had diminished by the presence of men whom they saw as belonging to lower social classes?

Remarkably enough, there are virtually no traces of reactions from junior nor senior diplomats who opposed the changes. The only one to be found in the Foreign Ministry's personnel files comes from Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle. As we have seen, this diplomat had served for eight years in the consular corps, after which his marriage with a rich woman had enabled him to embark upon a diplomatic career, starting at the bottom as a legation attaché. Reading the Royal Decrees of 15 July 1920, Lemaire felt very disappointed. In a letter to Bassompierre, he pointed out that many of the men with whom he had entered the consular corps were now consuls-general and thus liable for promotion to the rank of minister plenipotentiary. Conversely, he was still a first secretary. "Is that not profoundly unjust?" Lemaire asked. He explained that in 1910 Arendt had represented his entry into the diplomatic corps as "an exceptional favour" but that the new decrees threatened to turn this favour into "a dark disgrace." Clearly touched by the contents of Lemaire's letter, Bassompierre immediately sent a note to the Foreign Minister, warmly recommending Lemaire for immediate promotion to the rank of advisor. Less than two weeks later, it was settled.¹⁶⁵⁰

The Political Director's consideration for the prestige of the diplomatic corps might well have contributed to easing the worries of those junior diplomats who saw their career opportunities diminished. They might have indeed known that Bassompierre and Hymans would not just allow all consuls-general to obtain a transfer into the diplomatic corps. Just like his predecessor before the war, Bassompierre often collided with the Commercial Director over the promotion of consuls-general. In several occasions he managed to convince Hymans not to go with the Commercial Director's suggestions or not to give in to the requests of ambitious consuls.¹⁶⁵¹ Another possible reason why most diplomats were probably not too worried about the entry of consuls into the diplomatic corps, was that their new colleagues were sent to places where, in the words of one journalist of *Le Peuple*, "no diplomat wanted to go."¹⁶⁵² In addition to Mexico-city, where Renoz was sent to, these places were Rio de

¹⁶⁵⁰ AMBZ, PF 1426, "Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle", Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle to Albert de Bassompierre, 6 November 1920; Albert de Bassompierre to Léon Delacroix, 18 November 1920; ADCB, 1921, 170.

¹⁶⁵¹ See AMBZ, 12.943, "Agents consulaires accrédités comme Ministre", Farde 1: Principe, Note of Direction P, 1 July 1919, 20 March 1920, and 10 April 1920; Note of Direction B, 9 March 1920; Note of Direction SG, 29 March 1920. Most of these notes contain comments written by Hymans.

¹⁶⁵² ANONYMOUS, "Les Attachés de Légation," *Le Peuple*, 8 January 1920.

Janeiro, which for members of the diplomatic corps had a similar reputation, and Sofia, which was the capital of a young and unstable Balkan state which had fought with Belgium's enemies in the war.¹⁶⁵³ Belgian diplomats probably also knew that in the immediate afterwar there was a relative shortage of members of the diplomatic corps to man the increasing number of legations both within and outside of Europe.¹⁶⁵⁴ Moreover, the perspective of legations being raised to embassies opened new opportunities for senior members of the diplomatic corps to distinguish themselves.¹⁶⁵⁵

The caution with which the Foreign Ministry's leadership treated 'traditional' diplomats did not impede parliamentarians of different denominations from congratulating Hymans for widening the access to the diplomatic corps. Moreover, when Louis Piérard during the Foreign Affairs budget discussions in June 1920 repeated the old request that "we should recruit, from time to time, our diplomats from the consular corps", Hymans was the first Foreign Minister who could proudly declare that he had recently done that, and not less than three times. When Piérard then said he wished to say something about "the democratisation of our diplomacy" and stated that diplomats should no longer be "almost exclusively recruited from aristocratic milieus", Hymans could easily have replied that the decrees which were about to be published would certainly have a democratizing effect. The Foreign Minister could have stated that not only the increase of diplomatic salaries would allow him to recruit young men from wider social classes but also the transfer of consuls-general would make the diplomatic corps socially more diverse. In June 1920, there were indeed no noblemen among Belgian consuls. The fact that Hymans chose not to go into the democratizing effect of the reforms might have had something to do with his awareness that such a discussion could reveal that their effect was actually rather limited. This was probably also why the Foreign Minister did not reply to the intervention of his fellow party-member Louis Strauss. The Liberal MP indeed suggested that the consuls-general turned career diplomats were still 'Cinderella's' in the sense that they could only go where their colleagues did not wish to go. According to the Liberal MP, "the old system, the ideas of earlier times have to disappear, a new way of thinking has to guide the application of new statutes and may not thwart the movement which necessarily leads to the fusion of the diplomatic and consular

¹⁶⁵³ See CHARY, Frederick B., *The History of Bulgaria*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations, Santa Barbara, 2011, 47-66.

¹⁶⁵⁴ By early 1921, members of the diplomatic corps had been sent to many capitals where before the war there were only consuls. These included Budapest, Prague, Warsaw, Bangkok and Lima. See ADCB, 1921, 197-198; and 1930, 301-329.

¹⁶⁵⁵ By early 1921, six embassies had been established, while negotiations were carried out for two more. See ADCB, 1921, 197-198.

careers.” A few weeks later in the Senate, Hymans did choose to reply to the speech of the Catholic marquis Imperiali, with whom he found ready reception for his decision not to merge the diplomatic and consular corps. Hymans stressed that a fusion would be wrong because both careers required “a different training, a different education and different qualities” and that the Foreign Minister would have to judge when temporary – and in exceptional cases for consuls-general – permanent transfers were deemed effective.¹⁶⁵⁶ As such, the Royal Decrees gave the Foreign Minister considerable leverage in diplomatic personnel issues.

As parliamentary reporter for the country’s largest newspaper and as an advocate of merging the careers of the Belgian foreign service, Patris will certainly have listened attentively to the speeches of both Strauss, Imperiali and Hymans. Perhaps their words led him to conclude his otherwise very positive opinion on the Royal Decrees of 15 July 1920 on a warning yet stimulating note. “If Hymans succeeds to have the new regulations applied with the same large and practical spirit which has presided over their elaboration,” Patris wrote, “he will have deserved well of the Belgian industry and commerce.”¹⁶⁵⁷

Hymans, however, would not be around to apply the new decrees with largesse. About a month after Patris published his article, the Foreign Minister resigned. Henceforth, the decision to democratize the Belgian diplomatic corps lay in the hands of national politicians who managed to obtain the posting of Foreign Minister after elections with equal manhood suffrage had determined domestic political power relations.

November 1918 witnessed the subsiding of the Storm which had been raging over Diplomatic Island and, with greater intensity, over the Mainland. If anything, the Storm had made clear to Belgian publicists and journalists of the Mainland that they had an interest in knowing what was happening on Diplomatic Island. Several of them had sailed towards the island in the storm and had occasionally even debarked on the island. There they had come to know about the norms, values and opinions of the inhabitants of the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island. They had seen how politicians who had travelled to the resort as well had entered into an alliance with its primarily younger inhabitants whose views they shared. By the time the Storm had subsided, this alliance had consolidated its power under the direction of one politician with the aid of two formerly junior inhabitants of the House on that resort.

¹⁶⁵⁶ PHK, 10 June 1920, 1521-1522 and 1536; PHS, 23 July 1920, 627-628 and 639. See also AMBZ, 12.974, “Organisation consulaire belge”, Note of Direction P (Question posée à Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Question n° 18, 23 Mars 1920), 24 March 1920.

¹⁶⁵⁷ PATRIS, Edmond, “Pour nos diplomates et nos consuls. La réforme dans leur statut”, *Le Soir*, 26 July 1920.

The sailing publicists and journalists had also seen how the subsiding of the Storm had compelled the new leader of the Belgian resort to constantly travel back and forth between the island and the Mainland, where he received feedback from the growing group of politicians with an opinion about what was happening on the Belgian resort. Although this new leader could occasionally try to ignore these opinions, in the end he could not escape the fact that much more than before the war, the person in charge of the resort had to draw his authority from the approval of the people living on the Mainland. This meant he had to reckon with their opinions.

The sailing publicists and journalists knew this perfectly well. They also knew that much like the sedentary politicians on the Mainland, they had some influence on the leader of the Belgian resort. Albeit in very different degrees, all of them were indeed believed to be able to shape the opinions of the peoples living on the Mainland. Evaluating what had happened on Diplomatic Island during the storm and what was going on ever since, the publicists and journalists started to discuss the roles that both the permanent and temporary inhabitants of the Belgian resort had played. Partly because the Storm had done so much damage to the Mainland and because the island's inhabitants had been expected to prevent this from happening or at least to effectively enable the people from the Mainland to repair the damages, the opinions expressed by journalists and publicists were generally not very positive. Some of them seem to have used this negative climate to settle accounts with senior inhabitants of the House whose policy views they had always opposed.

On a more general level, the men in charge of the Belgian resort tried to remedy the negative dispositions of the self-declared voices of the Mainland's opinion by taking measures which were believed to render the structure of life in the Belgian resort on Diplomatic Island better suited for its inhabitants to defend and promote the Mainland's interests. In the end, the Storm seems to have brought Diplomatic Island closer to the Mainland and this would probably erode the independence of action of the island's traditional inhabitants. Conversely, however, the decreased distance and the fact that the structure of power on the Mainland made ruling over the Belgian resort necessarily a temporary affair, could in the long run also have positive effects on the island's permanent residents.

EPILOGUE: THE RETURN OF BARON BEYENS

In a letter to Van der Elst, written in March 1919 while the Belgian delegation was negotiating in Versailles, Beyens found that “one observes an absolute silence in my regard.” The diplomat regretted this, for he had very clear ideas about the attitude that the Belgian delegation should have adopted to obtain the best results. “We should have limited our program to our real needs,” he wrote to Van der Elst, explaining that “who asks too much obtains nothing.” He indeed believed that “financial and economic advantages will be of more value to us than territorial concessions.”¹⁶⁵⁸

Of course, Beyens knew that in early 1919 annexationist ideas prevailed in the Foreign Ministry, in the government, and in a substantial part of the press. However, as we have seen, in the government there were dissident voices as well. One of these, perhaps not the loudest one at the time, held ideas very similar to those of Beyens. In the same month as the diplomat confided his reflections about Versailles to Van der Elst, the Economy Minister Henri Jaspar complained, like Beyens, about the secrecy of the Belgian delegation and, like Beyens, believed that the Foreign Ministry’s focus on territorial rather than on financial issues was a great mistake.¹⁶⁵⁹ Fortunately for Beyens, after the delegation’s failure at the peace conference annexationist ideas would gradually become marginalized in Belgian politics and in the country’s press. As it seemed, most ‘nationalist’ politicians had merely used this set of ideas for a while until they realized that it lacked a social basis. Added to the removal in August 1920 of Hymans, who seemed to have wished to avoid press polemics at all costs, and his replacement by Jaspar in November of the same year, Beyens’s chances to pursue the diplomatic career sizeably increased.

This epilogue follows Beyens from the end of Hymans’s Foreign Ministership until his death in early 1934. The case of Beyens allows to sketch how the different themes of this book developed in the afterwar period. Most attention will be devoted to the relationship between diplomats on the one hand and politicians and journalists on the other hand. Yet this epilogue will also look briefly into the organisation of the diplomatic career, into the influence of the King on diplomatic appointments and into the system of diplomatic practice.

¹⁶⁵⁸ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 27 March 1919.

¹⁶⁵⁹ See Chapter Ten.

Beyens and the Politicians

In the wake of the press campaign which had cost him his appointment as Belgian representative in the Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission, Beyens took a gloomy view of the future. Yet when Hymans left the Foreign Ministry and became President of the Assembly of the League of Nations, there still seemed to be a spark of hope for Beyens. No longer threatened as Belgian Foreign Minister by journalists and publicists who blamed the diplomat for the Belgian lack of success in Versailles, Hymans decided to offer Beyens a function as representative in a League of Nations commission responsible for studying whether Sweden or Finland held sovereignty over the Åland Islands, an archipelago situated in between the two countries.¹⁶⁶⁰ In the prelude to his diaries which started in August 1921, Beyens remembered that the months when he was travelling between Sweden and Finland “ranked among the best of my existence.” If they wanted to understand how he felt, he told his readers, they should imagine “an unfortunate diplomat, kept at a distance in his country like a malicious animal, now re-establishing relations with foreign statesmen and a foreign sovereign, applying all his intelligence, his pen and his experience to find a solution for a difficult and delicate problem.” For Beyens, this was “being reborn, breathing again the air which his lungs were lacking.”¹⁶⁶¹

However, in contemporary letters to his wife, Beyens was less enthusiastic. Although he certainly liked reliving the diplomatic life, Beyens was indeed well aware of the temporary character of the mission. More importantly, he did not believe that the tide in Belgian government circles had as yet turned in his favour. Hearing the news that Jaspar was appointed Foreign Minister, the diplomat approvingly noted that a “very intelligent and not at all nationalist” politician had secured the position. Yet he also caught a number of unfavourable signs. First, he realized that Jaspar had been “cold” at him when they had met some time before and that he therefore had nothing to expect from the new Foreign Minister. Second, in his personnel policy Jaspar seemed to show a lot of leniency towards diplomats who held nationalist foreign policy ideas. He even appointed Gustave Guillaume as his *chef de cabinet*. In Beyens’s view “the son Guillaume” would certainly not “pass over such a nice opportunity to avenge his unsupportable father” and would advise the Foreign Minister against any measure that would allow him to honourably end his diplomatic career. In addition to Guillaume, at the Department there was another high-ranking nationalist official whom Beyens believed was bent on thwarting his ambitions. Bassompierre indeed still headed

¹⁶⁶⁰ See NORTHEGE, F.S., *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920–1946*, Teaneck, 1986, 77-78.

¹⁶⁶¹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 65, Journal ‘Mon Ambassade à Rome’, 1, 1921, 6-7.

the Political Direction. This “servile echo of M. Pierre Nothomb and of the *Comité de Politique Nationale*”, as Beyens called him, “did not forgive my opposition against the annexationist claims of which he was the fiery partisan, and especially he did not forgive my refusal to name him Political Director.” Third, the appointment of Carton de Wiart as Prime Minister convinced Beyens that the *Comité de Politique Nationale* “still has its word to say.” The diplomat knew very well that the members of the committee regarded him as one of their main enemies. Fourth, probably because he had been confronted with the new Prime Minister’s diplomatic ambitions during the war, Beyens also feared that Carton would be inclined to have politicians rather than diplomats placed at the head of Belgium’s top legations and embassies.¹⁶⁶²

Despite his conviction that nationalist ideas were still prominent in government and Foreign Ministry circles, Beyens decided to write to both Carton and Jaspar telling them that he would be very happy to serve the country in the diplomatic career. Much to his surprise, the new Foreign Minister wrote him a “very amiable” letter and stated that he counted on Beyens’s advice in foreign policy issues.¹⁶⁶³

Beyens did indeed not realize at the time that certainly after the resignation of Renkin in June 1920 and of Hymans in August of the same year, the tide had actually turned in his favour. Destrée was the only one of ten ministers who had supported Belgian annexationism during the war and afterwards but in late 1919 he had finally agreed to the Socialist Party line and had withdrawn himself from Belgian nationalist circles.¹⁶⁶⁴ Among the other ministers, there were notable anti-annexationists such the Socialist Vandervelde, the Catholic Poulet, and the Liberal Franck. Also Delacroix had long stopped believing that the annexationist ideas Orts had presented him with constituted a fruitful basis for the country’s foreign policy. In full agreement with the other ministers (among which the future Foreign Minister Jaspar), he had even decided that the personnel of the Foreign Ministry would have to be “completely reorganized.” In early November 1919, the Council of Ministers decided that “Baron Beyens would have to be called upon” to lead the new Belgian embassy in Tokyo “until he can be named to one of the great embassies.” The Council also decided that “M. de Bassompierre would be named Minister in Athens.”¹⁶⁶⁵

¹⁶⁶² AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 10, 16, 20 and 22 November and 2 December 1920; and n° 65, Journal ‘Mon Ambassade à Rome’, 1, 1921, 8.

¹⁶⁶³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 23 November and 13 December 1920.

¹⁶⁶⁴ DEFOORT, *Charles Maurras*, 151.

¹⁶⁶⁵ ARA, I 252/01, “Notulen van de Ministerraad”, 8 November 1920.

As it seemed, Beyens was never acquainted with the plans of the (second) Delacroix government, which had to make way in the same month for the Carton government. Upon taking office in the new government, Jaspar did inform Bassompierre of his intentions. Although in the Summer of 1919 negative perspectives on Belgian negotiations with Luxembourg had led Bassompierre to consider leaving the Foreign Ministry for functions as Belgian head of legation in Athens, more than a year later he realized that after the departure of Hymans he could not go to “a posting to which a debutant could aspire” without arousing “public malignancy”. Given that the Belgian legation in Tokyo would soon be elevated to the rank of embassy, Bassompierre felt that his appointment in Japan and subsequent entry into the diplomatic corps would be honourable enough to convince the public that he had not “been sent far away to dispose the Ministry of my presence – what the gutter press would neglect to say if I would receive some small posting.” Bassompierre managed to convince both Jaspar and the King to support his candidature for Tokyo, albeit on the tacit condition that he would spend the remaining eighteen years of his career in the Japanese capital.¹⁶⁶⁶ For Beyens, however, this outcome meant that he was still without a job.

While Bassompierre’s appointment led to the publication of a glorifying article in *La Nation belge*, a journalist of what the former Political Director labelled as the gutter press wrote exactly the kind of comment that he believed his nomination to a minor posting would have provoked.¹⁶⁶⁷ Bassompierre had been pushed out of the Foreign Ministry “because of his protection of the pernicious *Comité de Politique Nationale*,” a journalist of *Le Journal diplomatique et financier* wrote, adding that the former Political Director’s merits were “rather mince” because the “childish and clumsy campaign” of the *Comité de Politique Nationale* had only led to “irreparable failures and humiliations.”¹⁶⁶⁸ If Bassompierre is to be believed, the editor of *Le Journal diplomatique et financier* had even sent a copy of this article to the secretary of the Japanese emperor. By mistake, so the diplomat informed Jaspar, “the insulting stupidities this scribbler imputes to me” had arrived at his desk in Tokyo. Interpreting the journalist’s criticisms as more than a personal attack, Bassompierre pointed out to the Foreign Minister that the editor clearly had the intention to discredit the representative of Belgium in the eyes of the Japanese authorities. He therefore denounced “the

¹⁶⁶⁶ 1909-1914 and 1919-1934, n° 47, Albert de Bassompierre to Guillaume d’Arschot-Schoonhoven, 22 December 1920; ARA, T 031, “Papiers Henri Jaspar”, n° 1, Albert de Bassompierre to Henri Jaspar, 29 December 1920; ARA, T 225, “Papiers de Borchgrave”, n° 299, Albert de Bassompierre to Roger de Borchgrave, 29 December 1920.

¹⁶⁶⁷ ANONYMOUS, “Japon et Belgique”, *La Nation belge*, 23 March 1921.

¹⁶⁶⁸ ANONYMOUS, “Le nouveau ministre de Belgique au Japon”, *Le Journal diplomatique et financier*, 19 March 1921.

kind of patriotism that animates this individual, whom it would be difficult to give the honourable title of 'journalist'." Bassompierre also noted to Jaspar that "the present letter is not confidential."¹⁶⁶⁹

Until then, Bassompierre had not had too many negative experiences with Belgian journalists. During the war, many of them had even contributed to propagating the annexationist foreign policy which he had tried and ultimately succeeded to implement. Now that the editor of a fairly small journal openly criticized him, Bassompierre implicitly suggested that like most of his colleagues in the Belgian diplomatic corps he would rather not just ignore these insults but was ready to react to them.

Somewhat surprisingly, Beyens did not like the article either. Since he personally knew the editor of *Le Journal diplomatique et financier*, who had always defended Beyens's foreign policy, he feared that people would think the article was inspired by him. "I resent that idea," Beyens confided to his wife.¹⁶⁷⁰ By that time, however, Beyens also had an idea to rejoice in, namely that of soon becoming a Belgian ambassador himself. During dinner at Hymans's, Jaspar had apparently told him that he was very dissatisfied with the lack of professional diligence manifested by Count Werner van den Steen de Jehay and Count Léon d'Ursel, who represented Belgium in Rome with the Italian King and the Pope respectively. Because both Belgian legations in Italy were on the verge of becoming transformed into embassies, Jaspar wished to seize the occasion to invest new diplomats with these new functions. Beyens seems to have been his first choice for the embassy at the Quirinal. However, Van den Steen heard about the Foreign Minister's plans, which involved his transfer to Bucharest, "rushed" to Brussels and actually managed to convince Jaspar not to condemn him to – in Beyens's words – "this *diminutio capitis* which is a true humiliation." The Foreign Minister subsequently offered Beyens the – soon to become – embassy at the Holy See. This meant that d'Ursel would have to go to the much less prestigious legation in Romania. As Beyens tells us, to avoid this alleged dishonour d'Ursel exerted all his influence, "even that of his cousin the Duke." However, and with the risk of over-generalization, it seemed that in the afterwar period the country's leading aristocrats no longer possessed the power to avert this loss of prestige befalling on one of their family members. Jaspar – and the King, so Beyens claims – indeed refused to give in.¹⁶⁷¹

¹⁶⁶⁹ AMBZ, PF 1514, "Albert de Bassompierre", Albert de Bassompierre to Henri Jaspar, 9 June 1921.

¹⁶⁷⁰ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 20 June 1921.

¹⁶⁷¹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 65, Journal 'Mon Ambassade à Rome', 1, 1921, 8-11.

In this refusal, the power of the Foreign Minister was probably much more decisive for Beyens's fate than the influence of the King. During Jaspar's Foreign Ministership, the royal authority over diplomatic appointments indeed further diminished. The most notable illustration of this power shift had its origins in early 1922, when Albert had suggested to the Foreign Minister to allow the consul Maurice Cuvelier entry into the diplomatic corps. Acting on the advice of the diplomat who combined the functions of Political and Commercial Director, Jaspar repeatedly refused to grant Cuvelier this promotion and eventually informed the King personally that he preferred to exercise caution when it came to transferring consuls into the diplomatic corps.¹⁶⁷² Albert complied with Jaspar's refusal but renewed his efforts after the politician had left the Foreign Ministry and was succeeded by Hymans in March 1924. Yet also the new Foreign Minister was not inclined to give in, not even after the King had refused to sign a royal decree naming Cuvelier minister plenipotentiary in Teheran but without entry into the diplomatic corps. In January 1925, however, a compromise was reached. According to the King's *chef de cabinet*, Albert had defended Cuvelier's cause "in the sharpest manner and with true obstinacy" and finally managed to obtain from Hymans the promise that if the consul would satisfactorily exercise his functions in the Persian capital, he would receive his desired promotion after two years.¹⁶⁷³ It would take until the Summer of 1927 before Hymans's successor Vandervelde finally allowed Cuvelier to become a career diplomat.¹⁶⁷⁴

As it seemed, not only Jaspar but also his successors Hymans (1924-1925 and 1927-1934) and Vandervelde (1925-1927) were very susceptible not to discourage career diplomats by allowing too many senior consuls to enter the diplomatic corps. When Jaspar took over the Foreign Ministry in late 1920, there were five ministers plenipotentiary who had passed through all stages of the consular career. This number stayed the same in 1925, increased to six in 1930, and to seven in 1935. Averagely, there were less than three promotions of consuls into the diplomatic corps every five years.¹⁶⁷⁵ This certainly puts the internal democratization

¹⁶⁷² 1909-1914 and 1919-1934, n° 650, Guillaume d'Arshot-Schoonhoven to Gaston de Ramaix, 17 and 22 June, 3 July 1922; Gaston de Ramaix to Guillaume d'Arshot-Schoonhoven, 17 and 28 June 1922; Guillaume d'Arshot-Schoonhoven to Lieutenant-General Mélis, 11 July 1922; Guillaume d'Arshot-Schoonhoven to Albert de Belgique, 12 July 1922; Guillaume d'Arshot-Schoonhoven to Maurice Cuvelier, 17 25 July 1922; Henri Jaspar to Albert de Belgique, 18 October 1923.

¹⁶⁷³ 1909-1914 and 1919-1934, n° 973, Guillaume d'Arshot-Schoonhoven to Albert de Belgique, 8, 17, and 20 January, 11 and 27 February, and 5 March 1925.

¹⁶⁷⁴ 1909-1914 and 1919-1934, n° 973, Louis Wodon to Emile Vandervelde, 11 February 1927; Emile Vandervelde to Louis Wodon, 28 February 1927; Maurice Cuvelier to Louis Wodon, 19 August 1927.

¹⁶⁷⁵ ADCB, 1921, 198; 1925, 154-157; 1930, 170-173; and 1936-1937, 170-177 and 226-227.

of the diplomatic career into perspective and illustrates how, after initial signs of goodwill, the reforms of July 1920 were put into practice only with great reluctance.

Especially during Jaspar's Foreign Ministership, there were several other incidents which illustrate to what extent the Foreign Minister rather than the King decided about the careers of diplomats. These moreover reveal that the decisions of Jaspar also led several diplomats, at least one of which was very close to the King, to ask for Albert's intervention. They had little or no success.¹⁶⁷⁶

Of course, Jaspar had no complete independence in deciding which diplomat to appoint where. All nominations indeed had to pass through the Council of Ministers. Yet looking at the notes of the council's reunions, it seems that the Foreign Minister generally had his way.¹⁶⁷⁷ So too in the case of Beyens. At the reunion of 30 May 1921 the ministers had unanimously accepted Jaspar's decision to elevate the legation at the Holy See without changing the head of legation. At the next reunion they agreed after only "a short exchange of views" to the Foreign Minister's new proposal which consisted in appointing Beyens as ambassador at the Holy See and sending d'Ursel as minister plenipotentiary to Bucharest.¹⁶⁷⁸

After four and a half years in Rome, Beyens turned seventy and wished to retire. Yet after his retirement, the rehabilitation continued. For a large part, this was due to Vandervelde. When the Socialist politician became Foreign Minister in June 1925, Beyens had immediately congratulated him. Vandervelde had replied that "no expression of sympathy could be dearer to me than yours." In issues of foreign policy, he continued with a reference to the time when they were colleagues in the Le Havre government, "I have always felt myself in full communion of ideas with you and I cherish the memory of the difficult times when I was at your side, fighting against the dangerous tendencies of some of our compatriots."¹⁶⁷⁹ In early 1926, a few weeks after Beyens had left Rome, Vandervelde wished

¹⁶⁷⁶ See for instance the comments of prince Albert de Ligne on the promotion to first class minister plenipotentiary of Gaston de Ramaix, who thus jumped ahead of eleven other senior diplomats, including Ligne, without ever having headed a foreign diplomatic posting. Ligne labelled Jaspar's decision as "the gentle little muck Our Honourable Foreign Minister has just made" and asked the King to do something about that. The King could only promise to take it up with Jaspar. In the end, Ligne only obtained his own promotion more than a year and a half later. See ADCB, 1930, 170-171; 1909-1914 and 1919-1934, n° 683, Albert de Ligne to Guillaume d'Arschot-Schoonhoven, 14 May 1923; Guillaume d'Arschot-Schoonhoven to Albert de Belgique, 18 May 1923; Guillaume d'Arschot-Schoonhoven to Albert de Ligne, 31 May 1923. See also the case of René van der Elst, whom Jaspar refused to name minister plenipotentiary and who vainly appealed to the King's intervention. See AKP, ASA, n° III/B/3/5/1, René van der Elst to Pierre Forthomme, 3 and 5 January 1922; René van der Elst to Max-Léo Gérard, 10 February and 1 April 1922; Max-Léo Gérard to René van der Elst, 14 February 1922.

¹⁶⁷⁷ See for instance, in the first year of Jaspar's Foreign Ministership, ARA, I 252/01, "Notulen van de Ministerraad", 22 February and 23 July 1921.

¹⁶⁷⁸ ARA, I 252/01, "Notulen van de Ministerraad", 30 May and 27 June 1921.

¹⁶⁷⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 27/A, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Emile Vandervelde, 23 June 1925; Emile Vandervelde to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 26 June 1925.

to valorise this communion of ideas and offered him the presidency of the newly founded *Commission diplomatique*, which advised the Foreign Minister on very diverse issues relating to foreign policy making and to the workings of the Department in general.¹⁶⁸⁰ At the end of the same year, the Foreign Minister requested Beyens to combine these functions with the presidency of the *Commission du Personnel Extérieur*. In this quality, the retired diplomat held considerable influence on the fate of his former colleagues, as the other members of this commission generally tended to adopt his point of view in matters of promotions and transfers of diplomats and consuls.¹⁶⁸¹

Beyens's appointment as president of the *Commission diplomatique* heralded his rehabilitation in parliament. In the Chamber report of the Foreign Affairs budget, drafted by the former annexationist Louis Piérard, MP's could read how Vandervelde had "very fortunately put the *Commission diplomatique* under the presidency of an eminent diplomat, Baron Beyens."¹⁶⁸² When during the discussions of the budget in the plenary sessions Jaspar prided himself that he was the one who had allowed Beyens to pursue the diplomatic career, "where a profound injustice had removed him from", these words received much approbation.¹⁶⁸³ When during the next session Vandervelde had to defend himself for having allowed a parliamentarian in the *Commission diplomatique*, he argued that he was "as satisfied and as proud of that choice" as he was of the choice of Beyens. The Socialist minister thus tried to justify the unpopular choice of the parliamentarian (who happened to be one of his fellow party members) by connecting it to a choice that, he believed, all MP's applauded.¹⁶⁸⁴ When a few years later Vandervelde read aloud a passage from Beyens's 1916 letter in which the diplomat had assured the Dutch government that the Belgian government fully respected Dutch territorial integrity, one could hear "Very well! Very well!" resound on "all the benches", so the minutes secretary of the Chamber noted.¹⁶⁸⁵ As it seemed, now that Belgian annexationism was widely condemned, Beyens had come to function as a symbol of good governance and many MP's wished to associate themselves with him and his ideas.

¹⁶⁸⁰ In addition to Beyens, this commission was composed of the Foreign Minister and his *chef de cabinet*, the Political and Commercial Directors (Vandervelde had split up these functions which his predecessor had combined), and a Belgian delegate at the League of Nations. Beyens remained president of the commission until his death. Its importance, however, decreased during Hymans's third term as Foreign Minister (between 1927 and 1934). See AMBZ, 11.545, "Commission diplomatique", 1926-1938.

¹⁶⁸¹ See AMBZ, 12.926, "Procès-verbaux de la Commission du Personnel Extérieur", 1925-1927.

¹⁶⁸² PDK, Session 1925-1926, n° 168, 10 February 1926, 8.

¹⁶⁸³ PHK, 3 March 1926, 930.

¹⁶⁸⁴ PHK, 4 March 1926, 960-961.

¹⁶⁸⁵ PHK, 28 July 1928, 2328. See also PHK, 5 February 1930, 443.

Before proceeding to Beyens's rehabilitation in the press, it is important to look into another favour bestowed upon the diplomat when he was still in active service. In July 1923, Jaspar had convinced the Council of Ministers to appoint Beyens as the third Belgian delegate to the League of Nations' annual General Assembly. In that quality, he would accompany Hymans and Poulet, two politicians of the governing parties, to Geneva.¹⁶⁸⁶ Already in the Summer of 1917, Beyens had expressed to Hymans his belief in a league of democracies and in its ability to maintain peace and guarantee Belgian independence.¹⁶⁸⁷ In published writings, the diplomat kept defending the importance of the League until at least early 1925. In the conclusion to his memoirs about his childhood and adolescence at the Belgian legation in Paris during the French Second Empire, he stated that "the creation of the League of Nations has marked a first effort and a first step in a resolutely pacific direction."¹⁶⁸⁸

Yet in personal letters and in his diaries, Beyens was more sceptical. In June 1920, he had already confided to his wife that the procedures of the League did no justice to the work he had put in his report on the Åland question. More than two years later, at the occasion of the third General Assembly, the diplomat summarized these proceedings as "a lot of speeches, and little results." This awareness probably led Beyens to replace the words "high favour" with "nomination" in his letter of thanks to Jaspar for appointing him as delegate to the 1923 session of the Assembly.¹⁶⁸⁹

Upon his arrival in Geneva, Beyens immediately felt out of place. For one, he did not really care about the social and cultural issues he had to deal with as third delegate, and regretted that only Hymans was involved in the political matters which were more his cup of tea. For another, he disliked that the member states' delegates were seemingly held in less regard than journalists and the League's ordinary employees. After he had entered a session that really interested him, Beyens found that "the room was way too small" and "the best seats are taken by representatives of the press and also by the employees of the League of Nations, both male and female." The other delegates, including himself, "were standing, all too happy if one would give them the alms of a chair." More importantly, the diplomat claimed to be shocked by how the League worked, especially by the tediousness of the sessions, by the intrigues and alliances which let incompetent men prevail over competent ones, and by the veto system that allowed perfectly sensible motions to be denied at the initiative of one single

¹⁶⁸⁶ ARA, I 252/01, "Notulen van de Ministerraad", 28 July 1923.

¹⁶⁸⁷ PALO, "The Question of Neutrality", 240.

¹⁶⁸⁸ BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, *Le Second Empire vu par un diplomate belge*, II, Bruges and Paris, 1925, 486.

¹⁶⁸⁹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 19, 20, 22, and 24 June 1921; n° 65, Journal 'Mon Ambassade à Rome', 3, 44 (25 September 1922); n° 27/B, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Henri Jaspar, 10 August 1923.

delegate. One such perpetrator that Beyens referred to was a Persian delegate whom he knew. “I could not take this rug merchant seriously,” he admitted.¹⁶⁹⁰

If the democratization of diplomatic practices led to these results, Beyens seemed to argue, one should not pin much faith on these developments. The “morose disposition” in which he left Geneva induced him to write the following Summer to the Foreign Minister that he did not wish to take part in the next session of the General Assembly.¹⁶⁹¹ To Van der Elst, he confided that “the Assembly is kind of an international parliament, where one talks much but says nothing, where one schemes a lot in the corridors, where a lot of little, fairly ridicule vanities are agitating.”¹⁶⁹² His disillusion in the League of Nations more generally had convinced Beyens that, contrary to his initial expectations, the institution was incapable “to give us security by arbitrage and disarmament.”¹⁶⁹³

An even worse development in interwar diplomatic practice, at least in the eyes of Beyens, was the continuous presence of national political leaders on the international diplomatic scene. He particularly disliked those of the three countries which henceforth determined the fate of the world. According to Beyens, Lloyd George had “an inordinate ambition, which renders him insupportable to his contradictors, and dictatorial ways, as well as unlimited confidence in his peacekeeping mission.” The diplomat continued that “the mental state” of the British Prime Minister reminded him of that of Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference, where the American President “imagined to be the Moses of the new world, dictating his laws to the old continent.” For Beyens, “that state of mind comes close to illness.” Beyens was more tolerant for the French leaders. Imprudent discourses from Aristide Briand elicited from him exclamations such as “Oh! Those incorrigible orators!” and he recommended Raymond Poincaré “to add a little diplomatic oil to his style.”

Events really turned precarious, Beyens argued, when such “diplomatically inexperienced politicians” were sent to international conferences. Commenting, in early 1922, on conferences recently held in Washington and Cannes, and to be held in Genoa, Beyens wondered whether important political questions could really be brought up and successfully resolved “in the agitated atmosphere of international reunions, before the representatives of the world press who comment and distort all decisions.” Beyens indeed deemed “better to

¹⁶⁹⁰ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 65, Journal ‘Mon Ambassade à Rome’, 4, 26 (September 1923).

¹⁶⁹¹ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 27/A, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Paul Hymans, 24 March 1924.

¹⁶⁹² ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 32, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 30 August 1924.

¹⁶⁹³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 65, Journal ‘Mon Ambassade à Rome’, 4, 105 (October 1924).

confide them to Cabinet diplomacy, and then submit their situation to the approbation of parliaments.”¹⁶⁹⁴

One could argue, as has often been done, that the frustration of senior diplomats like Beyens primarily sprung from their realization that they were further and further removed from the centre of world politics, which was seemingly more and more occupied by national political leaders.¹⁶⁹⁵ Yet while proponents of *new diplomacy* proclaimed the preservation of world peace as their own central paradigm and charged *old diplomacy* with only serving the interest of one country, traditional diplomats kept believing that traditional diplomatic methods were best suited to keep the peace. In the case of Beyens, this becomes particularly apparent when reading his political testament, legated in the conclusion of his posthumously published 1934 memoirs *Quatre ans à Rome*. There, Beyens warned his readers for the consequences of the new system of diplomatic practice: “To consolidate the peace, they resort to periodical conferences and to the League of Nations. Conferences proliferate where heads of governments and politicians hold a seat but where diplomats are conspicuous by their absence. Their discussions are thrown on the air together with the hit songs of fashionable singers. This is diplomacy exposed, diplomacy in public. These dangerous means to pacify Europe have only led to controversies being envenomed and minds irritated.”¹⁶⁹⁶

Beyens shared his pessimism about the diplomatic qualities of national politicians with Belgian journalists. As we have seen, already in the aftermath of the Paris Peace Conference journalists blamed foreign and Belgian politician-diplomats for the failure of the principles of *new diplomacy* in general and for the unsatisfactorily results of Belgian foreign policy in particular. These criticisms only intensified throughout the 1920s and in the early 1930s.¹⁶⁹⁷ The lack of confidence that the editors of *La Libre Belgique* had in the peacekeeping function of conferences and in the competence of Belgian politicians provided their cartoonists with a lot of work. Commenting on the 1929 The Hague Conference on Reparations, where the Belgian government had sent Prime Minister Jaspar and Foreign Minister Hymans, they published a cartoon (fig. 3) which read “Will our diplomats manage to leap over *la haie* [= the

¹⁶⁹⁴ Similar comments pervade the four volumes of Beyens’s diaries. The quotations come from AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 65, Journal ‘Mon Ambassade à Rome’, 1, 155; 2, 7-8, 69, 141 and 189.

¹⁶⁹⁵ See the literature in the Introduction.

¹⁶⁹⁶ BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, *Quatre ans à Rome*, Paris, 1934, 299–300. See also Beyens’s warnings in the preface of earlier memoirs: BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, *Deux années à Berlin, 1912-1914*, I, Paris, 1931, Préface.

¹⁶⁹⁷ See, in addition to the articles mentioned below, HOSTE, Julius Jr., “De strijd voor den vrede. Naar een nieuw volkenrecht. Het gebrek aan veiligheid”, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 28 April 1929; ANONYMOUS, “Portraits en taille aigre-douce. Sir John Simon”, *Le Peuple*, 27 January 1934; WANNES, “Veehandel en diplomatie”, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 15 August 1929. The Flemish-language Socialist newspaper *Vooruit* was probably an exception to this tendency. See VAN DEN EYNDE, ‘*La morale*’, 25-26.

hedge, referring to La Haye, or The Hague] ???” The cartoon depicted animals who were bound to fail the jump and whose physiognomies very closely resembled those of Hymans and Jaspar. That very same day, the cartoonist had to express the fear of his editors that the conference would only stir up bellicose sentiments and led to bloodshed. To that end, he drew a picture (fig. 4) of a butcher standing in front of a line of conference delegates and declaring “Me, I am a partisan of conferences!” Above, it said “Those who profit from it.”¹⁶⁹⁸



Nos diplomates parviendront-ils à franchir la haie ? ? ?

Fig. 3: “Will our diplomats manage to leap over the hedge ???”

¹⁶⁹⁸ ANONYMOUS, “Ceux à qui ça profite. Moi, je suis partisan des conférences!”, *La Libre Belgique*, 13 August 1929; and ANONYMOUS, “Nos diplomates parviendront-ils à franchir la haie???” *La Libre Belgique*, 13 August 1929. See also ANONYMOUS, “La voix des grands morts”, *La Libre Belgique*, 22 August 1924.



Fig. 4: “Those who profit from it. Me, I am a partisan of conferences!”

Especially in newspapers such as *Le Soir*, *L'Indépendance belge* and *La Nation belge*, their frustration with the diplomatic incompetence of politicians even led journalists and publicists to plead for a return to the *old diplomacy*. Admittedly, some of these writers were not entirely impartial. With a brother in the Belgian diplomatic corps, the author of the quote which started this book certainly was one of them. In 1924, Henri Davignon published an opinion piece in *Le Soir* with the same title as his article in *La Revue générale* eleven years later. He argued that pre-war diplomacy certainly had its defaults but at least had “the merit not to hurt personal ambitions and individual prestige, [...] and to be as independent as possible from electoral fluctuations and parliamentary majorities.” Also some of *Le Soir*'s ‘career journalists’ supported this view.¹⁶⁹⁹ Like the cartoonist of *La Libre Belgique*, a journalist of *La Nation belge* drew his inspiration from the Hague Conference on Reparations. Exclaiming “please, give us back good old diplomacy!”, he argued that “since politicians play the diplomat, have themselves photographed and filmed in all colours, and claim to ‘declare peace to the world’, they are taking giant steps away from peace.”¹⁷⁰⁰ Commenting on the same conference, a colleague from *L'Indépendance belge* applied this argument specifically to Belgian politicians. “Our politicians, when they play the diplomat,” he argued, “think to act

¹⁶⁹⁹ DAVIGNON, Henri, “Diplomates et diplomatie”, *Le Soir*, 18 September 1924. See also DE MARES, Roland, “L’enlèvement”, *Le Soir*, 25 August 1929.

¹⁷⁰⁰ HISLAIRE, René, “M. Snowden a repoussé les dernières propositions des ‘Quatre’”, *La Nation Belge*, 27 August 1929. See also DUMONT-WILDEN, Louis, “La question Juive”, *La Nation Belge*, 27 August 1924; ANONYMOUS, “Les mémoires de Lord Bertie”, *La Nation Belge*, 26 October 1924. On the conference itself, see Jaspas’ own report: JASPAR, Henri, “The Hague Conference 1929”, *Bulletin of International News*, 6/5, 12 September 1929, 3-9.

smart by making conditional promises to incite their adversaries.” Yet, the journalist claimed to know, “the promises stay and the conditions are forgotten.”¹⁷⁰¹

As it seemed, a lot had changed since 1919, when journalists and publicists from the same newspapers favoured sending politicians on diplomatic missions abroad.¹⁷⁰² In their eyes, the experiment had clearly failed. Would this clear the road for a re-appreciation of traditional diplomats?

Beyens and the Press

Considering the negative disposition of journalists towards politician-diplomats in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, it should come as no surprise that Beyens’s political testament was well received in their newspapers. In a reference to *Quatre ans à Rome*, one journalist of *La Nation belge* named Beyens “one of the best diplomats Belgium has ever known.” Although the editors of *La Nation belge* had come to appreciate him after his resignation as Foreign Minister in 1917, several of their colleagues had long felt otherwise. This section investigates how their perception of Beyens, and of career diplomats more generally, evolved from the time of Beyens’s appointment as ambassador at the Holy See until the time of his death in the mid-1930s.

As Beyens noted in the Summer of 1921, “my nomination earned me a few insults from *Le Soir*, directed by my enemy of Le Havre, the journalist Patris, and of a rag called *La Politique*, where the *Comité de Politique Nationale* impotently vented its gall.”¹⁷⁰³ The latter article was written by Léon Hennebicq, one of the godfathers of Belgian nationalism and one of the last non-Catholic supporters of the committee, which in the early 1920s evolved in a reactionary Catholic direction and, as Beyens suggested, had lost its political importance by late 1921.¹⁷⁰⁴ Nevertheless, many Belgian prominent personalities still occasionally read *La Politique* and Hennebicq’s article even ended up in the King’s hands.¹⁷⁰⁵ It was very similar to the opinion pieces the editors of *L’Action nationale* had published two years earlier, with the difference that the anti-parliamentarian tendencies were much stronger. This could

¹⁷⁰¹ LE SPHYNX, “L’évacuation de la Rhénanie”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 3 October 1929. See also ANONYMOUS, “La nouvelle diplomatie anglaise. Méthode dangereuse”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 16 and 17 August 1929; and SAKODO, “Il y a vingt ans”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 2 August 1934.

¹⁷⁰² See for instance NEURAY, Fernand, “La diplomatie belge en Hollande”, *La Nation belge*, 25 March 1919; Destrée over hervormingen in Soir. See also GLYCAS, “Notre diplomatie”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 2 June 1919.

¹⁷⁰³ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 65, Journal ‘Mon Ambassade à Rome’, 1, 1921, 11.

¹⁷⁰⁴ DEFOORT, *Charles Maurras*, 151-153. The first signs of this decay were visible in November 1919, when the political party linked with the committee obtained only one percent of the parliamentary vote and only two seats. Both of these went lost at the 1921 parliamentary elections.

¹⁷⁰⁵ See the copy of this article in 1914-1918, n° 33/3.

probably be regarded as an omen of the turn away from foreign policy and to domestic politics that Belgian nationalism would make in the mid-1920s.¹⁷⁰⁶ Another, much smaller difference with the articles published in *L'Action nationale*, was that Hennebicq did not represent Beyens as Jewish, German, nor Dutch but rather as Czechoslovak. After declaring that “the parliamentary regime” was responsible for “resurrecting a diplomatic cadaver which was mummified since three years,” the nationalist publicist declared that “if the Scheldt remained closed to us, if Limburg is enslaved, then this fiasco is largely due to the record of pusillanimity set by this Czechoslovak expatriate.” Hennebicq claimed to have nothing against the Czechoslovak people, but loathed the fact that in addition to a “backstage government” and an “old-boy network”, “foreign infiltrations in our policy [...] are since long blowing over our national conduct a poisonous and pestilent wind which I would willingly call *Beyensisme*.”¹⁷⁰⁷

It is remarkable how nationalist journalists continued to place Beyens’s origins in foreign countries while he actually came from a family which at least from the early seventeenth century belonged to the elites of a Flemish town near Ghent, and while both his paternal grandfather and great-uncle ranked among, or so their 1868 entries in the Belgian *Biographie nationale* read, “the men whose energy and talent have prepared and led to the Belgian revolution of 1830.”¹⁷⁰⁸ It seems that Pierre Nothomb, like Léon Hennebicq, had not read these entries or had at least not accepted their contents. The young nationalist reacted to Beyens’s appointment in Rome by writing a thirty-page article which was published in a January 1922 edition of the Liberal – and temporarily nationalist – journal *Le Flambeau*.¹⁷⁰⁹ After Nothomb had charged Beyens with the full responsibility of the Belgian “fiasco” in Versailles, he argued that “if one would like to explain the errors of this superior man, one would have to say that he was too self-confident and did not have any faith in a country that he did not know.” According to Nothomb, Beyens was “cosmopolitan by birth and career” and could have been “a leader among us” were it not that he was “a stranger”.¹⁷¹⁰

Upon reading Nothomb’s accusations, which were set in less offensive language than those of other nationalist publicists, Beyens immediately contacted Jaspar. The diplomat complained that for several years writers had been heaping insults on him. As an example, he

¹⁷⁰⁶ DEFOORT, *Charles Maurras*, 151-152.

¹⁷⁰⁷ HENNEBICQ, Léon, “Le Beyensisme”, *La Politique*, 24 July 1921.

¹⁷⁰⁸ COEMANS, Eugène, “Beyens (Albert-Guillaume-Marie)” and “Beyens (Jean)”, *BN*, 2, 1868, 401-404.

¹⁷⁰⁹ See BOTS, *Bibliografie van de liberale tijdschriften: le Flambeau, 1918-1976: registers = Bibliographie des revues libérales: Le Flambeau, 1918-1976: tables générales*, Ghent, 1996, 1; DEFOORT, *Charles Maurras*, 159.

¹⁷¹⁰ NOTHOMB, Pierre, “La Déclaration de Sainte-Adresse. Ses origines et ses conséquences”, *Le Flambeau*, 31 January 1922, 14.

invoked Hennebicq's recent article. However, Beyens argued, that article was full of invectives and "one does not reply to invectives, one despises them." By contrast, he continued, Nothomb had "articulated very precise accusations [...] in a more decent style"¹⁷¹¹ Yet Beyens deemed Nothomb's practices "much more perfidious" primarily because he "distorts facts that he pretends to know."¹⁷¹¹ Both the precision of the accusations and their more elevated tone convinced Beyens that the time had come to react. Also the medium in which the accusations were formulated contributed to his decision. As Beyens later argued in a letter to Van der Elst, "I would have been really stupid not to take the advantage that he offers me by explaining myself in a form which suits me, that of an article in a review."¹⁷¹² In his request to Jaspar, Beyens made clear that for such a long time he had been impatiently waiting for the moment that he could finally respond to all the allegations imputed to him and "offer to the public" his explanations. He therefore urged the Foreign Minister to grant him permission to do so, repeatedly stressing that he would refrain from any incrimination and would not name a single one of his former colleagues.¹⁷¹³

Jaspar gave his permission "with pleasure". The Foreign Minister declared with a sense of self-evidence that "to the attack one has to respond" and then explained that he believed that the country had the right to be enlightened by those who had held the honour of guiding it through very difficult times.¹⁷¹⁴ In a way, Beyens was surprised by the conviction with which Jaspar had granted him his written permission and perhaps even more by the fact that the Foreign Minister had confirmed this decision unsolicited during a personal encounter. The diplomat indeed remembered that "in 1919 Hymans had not wanted or dared to take my defence" and that "in 1920 General Jungbluth had asked me on the King's behalf to observe silence."¹⁷¹⁵ What had changed?

First, Jaspar was not Hymans, who attached great value to good relations with journalists and was also successful in managing them. Jaspar, by contrast, had a bolder style and was more confrontational in his interactions with the press.¹⁷¹⁶ Moreover, unlike his

¹⁷¹¹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 60, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Henri Jaspar, s.d. [mid-February 1921].

¹⁷¹² ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 188, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 13 April 1922.

¹⁷¹³ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 60, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Henri Jaspar, s.d. [early February 1921].

¹⁷¹⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 60, Henri Jaspar to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 22 February 1921.

¹⁷¹⁵ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 188, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 13 April 1922.

¹⁷¹⁶ HELMREICH, Jonathan, "Paul Hymans and Henri Jaspar: contrasting diplomatic styles", *Studia Diplomatica*, 39/6, 1986, 669-681. See also Jaspar's intervention in het Council of Ministers after press attacks on the government in early 1919, in ARA, I 252/01, "Notulen van de Ministerraad", 14 January 1919.

predecessor, the Foreign Minister did not carry the burden of a failed territorial policy, the opposition against which was in several respects incarnated by Beyens and his declaration during the war that the Belgian government had no annexationist intentions towards the Netherlands. Second, the King had changed his mind. In a time when the sovereign's popularity was greater than ever, this could not be ignored by Jaspar. As Beyens wrote to Van der Elst, during his visit to Rome in late March 1919 Albert had spontaneously told him: "I do hope that you will respond to Nothomb and defend your policy which was the good one."¹⁷¹⁷ In his diaries, Beyens wrote that "the wind has turned in my favour at the Palace of Brussels" but immediately wondered: "Will it be the same with public opinion?"¹⁷¹⁸ If one would take into account only the manifestation of this opinion in the press, then Beyens's question could probably be answered affirmatively. The third element of change had indeed already been perceptible after news got out of the diplomat's appointment at the Holy See. Readers of several important newspapers were presented with elaborate and detailed argumentations in favour of Beyens's actions and moral behaviour during the war. The journalists of these newspapers framed the diplomat as the victim of annexationist agitators within the government. In *Le Soir*, Patris had tried to counter this perception by admonishing his colleagues that, if Beyens was innocent, they had to state who were the guilty ones.¹⁷¹⁹ Nevertheless, it appeared that at least a shimmer of doubt about Beyens's 'guilt' had entered the mind of the political journalist of the country's largest newspaper. Another indication that 'public opinion' had changed in the diplomat's favour came from Van der Elst's son. The former Secretary-General had read in *Le Flambeau* that Nothomb had dragged up the old accusations that he had left the Belgian diplomatic documents behind for the German army to find. One of the arguments his son used to calm him down was that the accusations were printed in an article which also took on Beyens. "You are criticized together with Beyens," young Van der Elst wrote, "there is no dishonour in that."¹⁷²⁰

To be sure, 'public opinion' in the eyes of Beyens – and Van der Elst, for all that matter – was foremost the opinion of an elite which moved in the highest political circles of the Belgian capital. For the diplomat, it were primarily (but not exclusively) these people to

¹⁷¹⁷ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 188, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 13 April 1922.

¹⁷¹⁸ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 65, Journal 'Mon Ambassade à Rome', 2, 1922, 98-99 (April 1922).

¹⁷¹⁹ See for instance ANONYMOUS, "Au jour le jour", *La Nation belge*, 11 July 1921; ANONYMOUS, "À propos de la nomination du Baron Beyens", *Le Bien Public*, 17 July 1921; ANONYMOUS, "La Ville et les Faubourgs. A propos de la nomination du Baron Beyens", *Le National Bruxellois*, 18 July 1921. See also PATRIS, Edmond, "Un peu d'histoire havraise. Le cas Beyens", *Le Soir*, 21 July 1921.

¹⁷²⁰ ARA, I 210, "Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst", n° 188, Jean van der Elst to Léon van der Elst, 15 February 1922.

whom he wished to explain his point of view. He had indeed “much suffered morally [...] to see an odious legend create itself against my name.”¹⁷²¹

Since this was the name he had to pass on to his children and their children, for all of whom he probably had the greatest ambitions, it was very important for him to set the record straight. Beyens did in a fifty-page explanation of how his policy responded to the country’s needs and of why the annexationist ideas of Nothomb could never have materialized. In the introduction, he had written that he had tried to broaden the debate and to elevate it above personal considerations. He had to admit, however, that one passage in Nothomb’s article had really hurt him. As Beyens wrote, “cosmopolitan by birth and career, to him I am a stranger. What gives him the right to question my patriotism? [...] To be of foreign origin, - which I am not, - does that make some of our politicians suspicious of not passionately loving their country?”¹⁷²² By referring to Belgian politicians, Beyens actually replied to the *Beyensisme* article of Nothomb’s friend Hennebicq, who had pleaded to “wipe” from the government “this Babelic throng” composed of “Jews, Germans, English and French” and finally give the power to “true Belgians”.¹⁷²³ More generally, Beyens questioned the Belgian nationalist conception of patriotism, the ethnic component of which he failed to appreciate. For him, patriotism seems to have been an ideal of service to King and Country which could be aspired to by all people who identified themselves as Belgians, regardless of where they or their ancestors were born. Beyens did not seem to believe in the idea of an organic Belgian nation whose necessary physical growth could only be stimulated by members of families which had lived on its soil from times immemorial.

Beyens’s response to Nothomb earned him congratulations from many colleagues and from several leading personalities, including the Belgian archbishop and the King. Albert apparently even told him that he had clearly won the struggle with Nothomb.¹⁷²⁴ From the King’s *chef de cabinet*, who seems to have been instructed to gather information about Beyens’s appearance in the columns of the press, the diplomat learned that also many editors of Belgian journals supported him, and most notably Neuray and the directors of *Le*

¹⁷²¹ ARA, I 210, “Papiers du Baron Léon van der Elst”, n° 188, Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 13 April 1922.

¹⁷²² BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, “Deux Politiques. Réponse à M. Nothomb”, *Le Flambeau*, 30 April 1922, 407-430. The quotation is on p. 408. See also BEYENS, Eugène-Napoléon, “Deux Politiques”, *Le Flambeau*, 31 May 1922, 23-42.

¹⁷²³ HENNEBICQ, Léon, “Le Beyensisme”, *La Politique*, 24 July 1921.

¹⁷²⁴ AMBZ, 12.481, “Papiers Beyens”, n° 25, Désiré-Joseph Mercier to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 13 August 1922; n° 62, Léon van der Elst to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens; 9 May and 21 June 1922; Edmond Gaiffier d’Hestroy to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 15 May and 28 June 1922; Camille Barrère to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 28 June 1922; Ludovic Moncheur to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 29 June 1922; n° 65, Journal ‘Mon Ambassade à Rome’, 3, 1922, 49 (October 1922).

Flambeau.¹⁷²⁵ With the obvious exception of Nothomb's weekly *La Politique*, which briefly intensified its campaign against him, after the publication of his reply Beyens only read positive and even praising comments in Belgian journals.¹⁷²⁶

Remarkably enough, even Patris had refrained from running down Beyens's response to Nothomb. In his diaries, the diplomat wrote that about two months before the publication of this reply, he received notice from the Foreign Ministry that he would have to receive fifteen Belgian journalists. These men wanted to travel to the Roman capital to cover the King's visit to Italy. "At their head the ineffable Patris, my personal enemy," Beyens commented, exclaiming "What will I not do to satisfy these lordships!" He would do all he could, including setting up an audience for them with the Pope. Beyens also confided to his diaries that his encounter with the journalist of *Le Soir* actually went quite well. "We have talked like old acquaintances," the diplomat found. At the end of his stay, Patris had sent him a letter thanking him for all the favours he and his colleagues had received. Yet this did not prevent Beyens from fearing that Patris's gratitude would not reach beyond the Italian border. "I expect that *Le Soir* will slash my response to Nothomb," Beyens wrote, claiming to know that Patris shared "Nothomb's illusions" and had supported Nothomb's annexationist campaign "with all his might."¹⁷²⁷

Yet apparently Patris's gratitude did reach until the Belgian capital. At least for a while. In his Brussels office the journalist would wait about six months before he wrote another adverse comments on Beyens's career.¹⁷²⁸ However, that seems to have been the last one. Admittedly, Patris did not prevent other contributors to *Le Soir* from doing so. Like Pierre Daye, the number two of the *Comité de Politique Nationale* and a future senator for the extreme Right party Rex, who in October 1922 renewed older accusations against Beyens. The diplomat immediately reacted, refuting the allegations in an open letter to the editors of

¹⁷²⁵ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 62, Guillaume d'Arschot-Schoonhoven to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, 13 August 1922.

¹⁷²⁶ For the article in Neuray's newspaper, see, ANONYMOUS, "Une page d'histoire diplomatique de la guerre. La politique du Baron Beyens. Un débat intéressant à propos de la politique suivie au Havre par l'ancien ministre des Affaires Etrangères", *La Nation belge*, 17 June 1922. See also ANONYMOUS, "De politiek te Havre. De veroordeling van het Belgisch annexionisme door Engeland en Frankrijk", *De Standaard*, 19 June 1922; and D., "Notre politique extérieure", *La Flandre libérale*, 31 May 1922. Attacks on Beyens are to be found in ANONYMOUS, "Notes politiques. Les erreurs de M. Beyens", *La Politique*, 14 May 1922 ; ANONYMOUS, "Notes politiques. M. Beyens et le Rhin", *La Politique*, 25 June 1922.

¹⁷²⁷ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 65, Journal 'Mon Ambassade à Rome', 2, 1922, 99 (April 1922).

¹⁷²⁸ This is the article cited in Chapter 8 concerning Albert Garnier-Heldewier: PATRIS, Edmond, "Une Ambassade princière à Sofia en 1915. Comment la Bulgarie entra en guerre contre les Alliés", *Le Soir*, 19 September 1922.

Le Soir.¹⁷²⁹ As Beyens confided to his diaries, Jaspar was not too happy with this procedure. It was indeed customary for a diplomat to ask permission before engaging in press polemics. As we have seen, such permission was more often denied than granted. Beyens, however, deemed that the precedent of the Nothomb article gave him the authority to react.¹⁷³⁰

At any rate, Beyens would not have to test the Foreign Minister's patience too much, for the Daye articles seem to have constituted the Belgian nationalists' swan song of allegations against the dean of the Belgian diplomatic corps. As Van der Elst put it in a letter to Beyens, "on the one hand your appointment in Rome was a first reparation, which in itself ranged public opinion on your side, while on the other hand all your adversaries are discredited and have lost their ephemeral popularity." Van der Elst added that "the country, for a moment seduced by their unrealizable dreams, feels that it has been deceived and finds its traditional wisdom again."¹⁷³¹ Gradually, even the editors of *Le Soir* came accept this point of view. In October 1925, after Beyens had been inducted as a member of the French *Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, one of their journalists approvingly noted that the academy's president emphasized "the imperishable titles Baron Beyens had acquired in the French gratitude."¹⁷³² Clearly, a lot of water had passed under the bridge since Beyens was called pro-German and an enemy of France in the same newspaper. His rehabilitation in the Belgian press seems to have been completed. A few months earlier, he had even read in several other newspapers that he could well become the next Foreign Minister.¹⁷³³

As it seemed, the rehabilitation of Baron Beyens in the Belgian press went accompanied with a more general turnabout in journalistic perceptions of the country's diplomats. Studying the four largest Flemish-language and the six largest French-language Belgian newspapers in 1924, 1929, and 1934 (the year of Beyens's death) reveals that their journalists produced nearly only neutral and positive articles about the members of the Belgian diplomatic corps.¹⁷³⁴ Admittedly, journalists of the Flemish-language press were

¹⁷²⁹ DAYE, Pierre, "Notre empire colonial", *Le Soir*, 4 October 1922; ANONYMOUS, "Une lettre du baron Beyens. La perte de Tabora", *Le Soir*, 18 October 1922. On Pierre Daye during the interwar period, see DE MARNEFFE, Daphné, *Pierre Daye et l'entre-deux-guerres, du récit de voyage à la réflexion politique*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Université de Liège, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, 2001.

¹⁷³⁰ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 65, Journal 'Mon Ambassade à Rome', 3, 1922, 53-57 (20 October 1922).

¹⁷³¹ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 62, Léon van der Elst to Eugène-Napoléon Beyens; 9 May 1922.

¹⁷³² ANONYMOUS, "Le baron Beyens a l'Académie des Sciences morales et politiques", *Le Soir*, 11 October 1925.

¹⁷³³ AMBZ, 12.481, "Papiers Beyens", n° 65, Journal 'Mon Ambassade à Rome', 4, 1923-1925, 152 (May 1925).

¹⁷³⁴ Judging from the (incomplete) data provided by Els De Bens (DE BENS, *De pers in België*, 37) for 1930 and 1935, these were *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *Nieuws van den Dag*, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, and *Vooruit* for the Flemish-language press, and *Le Soir*, *La Dernière Heure*, *La Libre Belgique*, *Le Peuple*, *La Nation belge* and

comparatively less enthusiastic, expressing very little opinions about these men.¹⁷³⁵ Nevertheless, even journalists of *Het Laatste Nieuws*, who in 1919 had still suggested that diplomats received too elevated salaries, in 1924 pleaded to raise these salaries and more than ten years later implicitly argued that the henceforth economically skilled diplomats were worthy of this money.¹⁷³⁶ In the French-language newspapers, appreciations of the Belgian diplomats' competences in the economic sphere were more explicit. While one journalist of *L'Indépendance belge* approvingly noted in 1924 that young men on the verge of taking the diplomatic exam showed great interest in the Antwerp harbour, ten years later colleagues of the same newspaper and of *La Nation belge* acknowledged that diplomats were more economically schooled and took many fruitful initiatives to further the Belgian commerce and industry.¹⁷³⁷ Around the same time, buyers of *Le Soir* could read how the retired consul Edouard Pollet, who had never been a great friend of his colleagues pursuing the diplomatic career, stated that "our new generation of diplomats is perfectly aware of the capital importance of our economic interests abroad and take to heart to do everything they can to safeguard the protection of these interests and to promote their development."¹⁷³⁸

Lack of economic knowledge and initiative ranked very high on the list of criticisms that Belgian journalists in both the pre-war and immediate afterwar periods had addressed to the country's diplomats. Just above or just below, journalists had put the aristocratic bias in the recruitment of new diplomats. They had also suggested that increased payment would remedy the over-representation of men from these upper classes which were regarded as aversive towards economic diplomacy. Yet neither in 1924, 1929, nor 1934, there seem to have been written newspaper articles commenting on the social stratification of the diplomatic corps. However, if one would consult lists of the men pursuing the diplomatic career between the mid-1920s and the mid-1930s, one would notice that not much had changed in comparison with the pre-war period.

L'Indépendance belge. This selection includes the largest Catholic, Liberal, Socialist, and Neutral newspapers of the country in terms of circulation figures.

¹⁷³⁵ In the years under scrutiny, *Nieuws van den Dag*, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, and *Vooruit* did not seem to contain any positive nor negative appreciations of members of the Belgian diplomatic corps.

¹⁷³⁶ See ANONYMOUS, "Kronijk van den dag. In de 'Fédération libérale' te Brussel", *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 25 June 1924; HOSTE, Julius, "Onze uitvoer. Een levenskwestie", *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 10 November 1935.

¹⁷³⁷ See ANONYMOUS, "Notes. Nos futurs diplomates", *L'Indépendance belge*, 4 October 1924; DE LA BOVERIE, Charles, "Un débat au Sénat. Notre politique commerciale. Les déclarations de M. Hymans", *L'Indépendance belge*, 10 February 1934; ANONYMOUS, "Les entraves douanières à nos exportations. Nos diplomates ne restent pas inactifs", *La Nation belge*, 8 April 1934.

¹⁷³⁸ POLLET, Edouard, "Nos services extérieurs", *Le Soir*, 25 December 1934.

Survey year	Nobility <1555	Nobility >1555-1795<	Total	Nobility > 1795	Total	Roturiers
1899/12/15	11.8 (8/68)	29.4 (20/68)	41.2	27.9 (19/68)	69.1	30.9 (21/68)
1905/01/01	17.5 (14/80)	28.8 (23/80)	46.3	25 (20/80)	70.3	28.8 (23/80)
1910/07/01	20.0 (17/85)	29.4 (25/85)	49.4	27.1 (23/85)	76.5	23.5 (20/85)
1925/07/01	18.5 (17/92)	25 (23/92)	43.5	(18/92)	63.1	37 (34/92)
1930/07/01	19.3 (17/88)	21.6 (19/88)	40.9	(18/88)	61.4	38.6 (34/88)
1935/07/01	18.2 (16/88)	21.6 (19/88)	39.8	(21/88)	63.7	36.4 (32/88)

Table 2: Share of nobles and roturiers in the Belgian diplomatic corps, 1899-1935

As Table 2 shows, the de-aristocratization of the Belgian diplomatic corps remained fairly limited in the interwar years, especially considering that more than a handful of new diplomats had been ‘imported’ from the consular career. The reality indeed was that despite sizeable increases in diplomatic salaries, *la Carrière* remained the privilege of the rich. Only after the Second World War would salaries gradually start to suffice to cover the actual costs of a career in diplomacy.¹⁷³⁹ At any rate, the lack of criticisms on the social stratification of the Belgian diplomatic career in the late 1920s and early 1930s suggests that at least Belgian journalists and newspaper editors in this period deemed Belgium’s disposing of an internally democratized diplomatic corps much less important than the country’s having diplomats who had ‘democratized’ their practices by taking an active interest in economic issues.

Perhaps the high birth of many Belgian diplomats in a way evoked the journalists’ admiration. At least, this is the impression one gets when looking at how individual diplomats were portrayed. Articles containing positive appreciations about one particular diplomat no longer focused exclusively on the diplomat’s merits in furthering the country’s economic interests.¹⁷⁴⁰ Especially in the 1930s, journalists seemed to emphasize the virile, even heroic qualities of Belgian diplomats. One collaborator of *L’Indépendance belge* devoted an article to the “exploits” of two Belgian diplomats who had beaten their colleagues from other countries to win the *Coupe des diplomates*, an annual tennistournament held in Paris.¹⁷⁴¹ A journalist of *Le Soir* particularly appreciated that the junior diplomat Henri Borel de Bitche had received his promotion to advisor. He noted that in a reaction to a British colonel’s

¹⁷³⁹ ROOSENS, “L’accès à la carrière diplomatique”, 162-163.

¹⁷⁴⁰ For examples of articles that do, see ANONYMOUS, “Un diplomate”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 12 February 1924; and ANONYMOUS, “La Journée. Nos diplomates. Une nouvelle inexacte”, *La Libre Belgique*, 26 October 1924.

¹⁷⁴¹ ANONYMOUS, “Sur tous les courts. De l’autre côté du filet... Succès belge à Paris”, *L’Indépendance belge*, 28 June 1934.

“ridiculous lucubration” Borel had declared “that he would gladly be in the presence of the colonel to give him the dressing down that he deserves.”¹⁷⁴²

By the mid-1930s, many journalists and newspaper editors had indeed come to look at the country’s diplomats in a different way. In 1934 and 1935, the almost three hundred thousand readers of *Le Soir* regularly saw photographs of Belgian diplomats, often in full regalia and in the company of European leaders, covering part of the front page of their newspaper. At the bottom of these photos, they could mostly read not much more than the stately names of “the baron de Cartier de Marchienne”, “the count della Faille de Leverghem”, “the baron de Gaiffier d’Hestroy”, and the “count de Kerchove de Denterghem”.¹⁷⁴³ After the death of Gaiffier in late July 1935, buyers of *La Nation belge* could read on the front page of their newspaper an article glorifying the diplomat which carried the subtitle “Defender of Belgian interests.” The author of the article went at great lengths to stress how Gaiffier was one of several diplomats – he also named Cartier, Moncheur, and even the once reviled Fallon – who were “very Belgian, and certainly not like the cosmopolitans” of, for instance, the British diplomatic corps.¹⁷⁴⁴ As such, the journalist maintained the claim that the men representing the Belgian state abroad needed to be ‘ethnic’ Belgians. Yet at the same time he ‘nationalizes’ them: diplomats were henceforth part of the national community. In combination with the large photo of Gaiffier lying on his deathbed (fig. 5) wearing his diplomatic uniform, readers of *La Nation belge* were induced to identify with the diplomat as one of their compatriots but at the same time they were stimulated to admire the life’s work of a man who had been privileged to serve the country at the highest levels and had visibly been greatly honoured exercising these activities.¹⁷⁴⁵

More generally, the uniforms and medals that diplomats wore in newspaper photo’s conferred them an aura of expertise, prestige and authority which must have greatly appealed to readers in the 1930s.

¹⁷⁴² ANONYMOUS, “Petite Gazette. À propos d’une promotion”, *Le Soir*, 17 May 1934.

¹⁷⁴³ See for instance ANONYMOUS, “M. Hymans à Londres”, *Le Soir*, 19 May 1934; ANONYMOUS, “La mission spéciale belge à Madrid”, *Le Soir*, 18 June 1934; ANONYMOUS, “A la présidence du Reich”, *Le Soir*, 14 September 1934; ANONYMOUS, “M. Hymans à Londres”, *Le Soir*, 19 May 1934; ANONYMOUS, “Angleterre et Belgique”, *Le Soir*, 13 December 1934; ANONYMOUS, “Cérémonies franco-belges à Paris”, *Le Soir*, 25 December 1934; ANONYMOUS, “Nos diplomates”, *Le Soir*, 18 May 1935. Also pictures of foreign diplomats accredited in Brussels figured on the front pages of Belgian newspapers. See for instance ANONYMOUS, “Les diplomates au Te Deum”, *La Dernière Heure*, 25 February 1934; ANONYMOUS, “Le Roi Léopold reçoit le corps diplomatiques”, *Le Soir*, 2 March 1934.

¹⁷⁴⁴ D’YDEWALLE, Charles, “Le baron de Gaiffier d’Hestroy. Défenseur des intérêts belges. Vingt ans d’ambassade à Paris”, *La Nation belge*, 22 July 1935.

¹⁷⁴⁵ ANONYMOUS, “Le baron de Gaiffier d’Hestroy sur son lit de mort”, *La Nation belge*, 22 July 1935.



Fig. 5: "Baron de Gaiffier on his deathbed"

This brings us back to Henri Davignon and his 1935 column on diplomacy and diplomats. As we have seen in the introduction, Davignon represented diplomats as "specialist phenomena", as "communicators and executors", and even as "creators and magicians". He also opposed them to politicians, who did nothing but "overbidding" and "intriguing", and argued that in the eyes of the public, the expertise and decisiveness of diplomats had gained them an aura of prestige. In comparison with his 1924 article in *Le Soir*, Davignon now openly pleaded to replace the incompetent politician-diplomats with the mysterious foreign policy experts that career diplomats were. Yet despite the apologetic message of the article and the evident partiality of its author, Davignon's assessment of public opinion on Belgian diplomats, or at least of the opinion on these men published in Belgian newspapers, seems to have been largely correct. As we have seen, so was his assessment of published opinion, which he helped to construct himself, on Belgian politicians and more particularly on Belgian politician-diplomats.¹⁷⁴⁶

Due to the necessarily cursory character of this epilogue, drawing conclusions on the press representation of diplomats in the interwar period runs the risk of leading to over-

¹⁷⁴⁶ See in this regard POUILLARD, Véronique and Pierre VAN DEN DUNGEN, "Pour que le peuple lise? Publicités et démocratisation en Belgique", in WITTE, *Natie en democratie*, 369.

generalization, especially if one would try to connect the development of this representation to processes of democratization. Nevertheless, it could be argued that in Belgian newspapers of this period democratization revealed itself to Belgian diplomats as a many-headed monster. In the immediate afterwar, its most expressive face was that of nationalism. Journalists set themselves up as the people's voice and used discourse strategies of 'othering' to alienate diplomats from the national community. Diplomats were members of a transnational, aristocratic community, and thus, journalists argued, they were incapable of rightly serving the nation. Politicians were democratically elected, and thus better up to the task. Yet in the later interwar years appeared a face of democratization that was friendlier to diplomats but harsh to politicians. Popular dailies, accessible to ever larger groups of people, now expressed their disapproval of parliamentary politics and of the ventures of politicians on the diplomatic scene. Politicians now became the ones who did not serve the country rightly, and only seemed to serve themselves. Diplomats, too, however, were still 'othered', but in a very different way. We can indeed conceive of 'othering' as a process of totemising, as conferring mystery, magical qualities and even reverence.¹⁷⁴⁷

¹⁷⁴⁷ COUPLAND, "'Other' representation", 241-248.

CONCLUSION

Henri Davignon's neglect to discuss the social status of Belgian diplomats in the two decades before his time of writing served to hide his awareness that the public had not always felt the admiration for these men that Davignon attributed to it in Autumn 1935. This especially applied to the years from the outbreak of war until the beginning of the 1920s. Moreover, Davignon's statement that the Belgian public ignored its diplomats in the allegedly golden times of pre-war diplomacy, was not exactly true.

In the decades before the First World War, public perception of Belgian diplomats was partly determined by the image of an elitist fraternity whose expensive idleness seemed incompatible with a democratizing society. In the opinion of parliamentarians and journalists of different denominations, these aristocrats were not worthy of the taxpayers' money because they cared little or not for the country's economic interests. Apart from that, diplomats seemed to have lost touch with their home country because of their long stays abroad, where they only seemed to occupy themselves with dining and dancing. Many parliamentarians and journalists valued Belgian consuls much higher than the country's diplomats. Arguing that the more modest backgrounds and economic education of these men enabled them to more effectively support Belgium's commercial and industrial development, some of them went as far as to urge for the entry of consuls into the diplomatic corps, thus providing the country with diplomats able to live up to the public's expectations. As the First World War drew near, the idea of a merger between the diplomatic and consular careers gained more and more ground in both parliament and the press. The fact that neither this merger nor more general reforms of the access to the diplomatic career materialized does not suffice to state that diplomats were ignored by the public.

Perhaps Davignon would have been more accurate claiming the opposite. For a long time, Foreign Ministry officials and diplomats did not seem to bother about the allegations formulated against them by the self-declared voices of public opinion. They did not believe in the validity of these criticisms and were confident that both the King, the government and the parliamentary majority had their back. Only in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war and only with regards to the status of consuls, did pressure from parliament and the press provoke minor discussions inside the Department.

However, Davignon knew perfectly well that portraying Belgian diplomats as indifferent, or even aversive, towards the public would seriously undermine the apology for

traditional diplomacy that he was constructing. He also knew that the pre-war democratization process instigated by street protests, press campaigns and the eventual extension of the franchise had driven several young men of high birth and great wealth to the world of diplomacy. The fact that some of them were particularly attracted to this world because it would allow them to dwell among like-minded people in a cosmopolitan atmosphere, he realized, would perhaps not go down well with his nationally-minded audience.

Davignon therefore chose to stress the 'mysterious' aspect of diplomats, depicting them as creators and even magicians. In the cultural climate of the 1930s, Davignon seemed to believe, the same mystery that journalists and politicians had often condemned before and during the war because it symbolized the secrecy and allegedly undemocratic practices that diplomats engaged in, now stirred the public's imagination. This allowed him to frame their isolation from the world of the Belgian people as an essential part of this mystery. According to Davignon, there was no need for the public to really get to know the country's diplomats. He even argued that neither their opinion nor their private life actually mattered.

Yet they certainly did. In a social-professional world where the public and private spheres were so tightly knit together, the distinction of which biographical elements belonged to one sphere and which to another could hardly be made. Furthermore, the opinions of diplomats certainly carried some weight. Diplomats were indeed not, as Davignon claimed, mere transmitters and executors. On the contrary, the ideas that they developed and the interests that they perceived were to a large extent personal and conditioned the way that they acted as diplomats and as Belgian citizens.

The foreign policy views of Belgian diplomats in the decades before the First World War, for instance, clearly affected their actions in relation to the Belgian public. Especially in the beginning of that period, the making and execution of Belgian foreign policy belonged to the realm of the King, who could count on the loyal collaboration of his diplomats. At least formally, there was a clear-cut division of labour in this field. Leopold II indeed occupied himself with imperialist and colonial politics, while the country's top diplomats and Foreign Ministry officials tried to mitigate the destabilizing effects of the royal policy on the country's neutralist position in European diplomacy. Informally, however, many diplomats actively contributed to elaborating and consolidating the King's colonial oeuvre. In the long run, difficulties of reconciling neutrality and imperialism contributed to creating a rift between on the one hand those diplomats and functionaries who believed in the prevalence of neutrality over imperialism, and on the other hand those who started to dislike neutrality because they saw it as a bridle on overseas expansion.

This rift more or less corresponded with a generation gap. In general, the older diplomats and functionaries, many of whom had initially supported Leopold II's colonial projects, clung to neutrality as the best means to safeguard the country's independence on a continent where tensions between greater powers threatened to erupt. These men did not feel the need to engage in public debate about Belgian diplomacy. Convinced that their knowledge and experience enabled them to most effectively protect the interests of the Belgian state, they adopted the same self-effaced attitude in public debate as the one which was expected from them as representatives of neutral Belgium on the international scene. The foreign policy that they executed had long been favoured by most members of the Catholic government, who believed in neutrality as well and did not wish to take the unpopular measures that a more active foreign policy required.

The younger, so-called Congo generation of Belgian diplomats, by contrast, fully embraced the King's imperialist oeuvre and venerated the sovereign for it. These diplomats believed in the potential of the project to bridge partisan divisions and imbue the Belgian public with an imperial mind. In their view, this would result in a morally elevated public and would thus allow to contain the inevitable democratization of Belgian society, or at least to put it on the right track. Of course, effectively defending and maintaining the Belgian empire also meant replacing the traditional, 'passive' concept of neutrality with a more 'active' neutrality, which implied strengthening the Belgian army and continuing to work towards the country's economic expansion. To this end, some members of the Congo generation abandoned the reticent attitudes that their superiors expected from them and expounded their views in articles and booklets and during lectures.

However, because the public addressed in these media was largely composed of a small group of like-minded members of society's upper classes, these initiatives had little effect on the more general public perception of Belgian diplomats. They did, however, contribute to weakening the boundaries between the world of diplomacy and the worlds of politics and the press. A common set of ideas indeed developed in the margins of these three worlds. Like some Congo generation diplomats, also a minority of politicians from different parties and a small nucleus of journalists and publicists shared an organic conception of the Belgian nation, which needed to measure itself with other nations in a struggle for growth.

The outbreak of war in August 1914 brought the members of these three groups together in the French coastal town of Sainte-Adresse, which from October 1914 onwards functioned as the seat of the Belgian government in exile. There, a miniature version of Belgian society was created in which the nationalist ideas propagated by these three groups

became predominant. A variety of reasons contributed to the breakthrough of these ideas. First, in the years immediately preceding the war, the main advocates of Belgian neutrality retired and members of the Congo generation came to occupy the top positions of the Foreign Ministry's Political Direction, which was responsible for delineating Belgian foreign policy. Second, the war itself had stimulated patriotic sentiments in many Belgians abroad and nationalists adroitly channelled these sentiments towards the idea of a greater Belgium. They indeed managed to make a significant number of converts among politicians and journalists in Sainte-Adresse. Third, the war had created opportunities to materialize this greater Belgium that were more tangible and could more convincingly be reconciled with the organic concept of the Belgian nation, thus increasing the canvassing power of the nationalist doctrine. Belgian nationalists indeed believed that the dream of a greater Belgium could now materialize within Europe. In their view, attaching – or rather re-attaching – the parts that their nation had lost to the Netherlands in 1839 and which continued to bleed, would make the country whole again. Henceforth, annexationism – referring to the desired annexation of primarily Dutch Limburg, Zeeland Flanders, and Luxembourg – was the most prominent expression of Belgian nationalism. Fourth, the replacement of the actual Belgian public, the vast majority of which lived in occupied Belgium, by a surrogate public primarily composed of like-minded spirits allowed nationalist journalists and publicists to set themselves up as the voice of the Belgian people. The actual Belgian people thus became an abstract entity to which they could ascribe qualities of heroism and patriotism which in peace time they risked to see contradicted. More importantly, they could cloak the Belgian nation's heroism and patriotism as guided by the desire to obtain their own goal of territorial expansion. Fifth, the nationalist ideas of the Congo generation came to dominate political life in Sainte-Adresse because prominent members of the government legitimized them. Regardless of the extent to which these politicians believed in their realization, for them these ideas and the support they carried functioned as potent tools in a power struggle with the Belgian King Albert.

The outbreak of war had temporarily eliminated the field of Belgian domestic politics, which induced the members of the government to direct their attention towards the domain of foreign policy. Possibly inspired by developments in the policy-making of Belgium's Allies, the Cabinet Chief Baron Charles de Broqueville in particular seemed convinced that the mandate which he had received from the public as a politician elected before the war, gave him the authority to actively intervene in this field. His efforts to do so put him at odds with the King, who traditionally held the supreme authority over Belgian foreign policy. To strengthen his position within the Belgian political community, Broqueville resorted to the

language of annexationism. This not only gained him the support of other powerful members of the government but also from the circle of journalists and publicists who had set themselves up as the public's voice. Furthermore, through the language of annexationism he acquired the sympathy of the younger generation of Belgian diplomats and Foreign Ministry officials who dominated the Political Direction. Broqueville had indeed well perceived that the nationalists in the worlds of politics, the press, and diplomacy had joined forces and henceforth constituted a powerful lobby that pressed for the expansion of Belgium within Europe. They argued that this necessitated abandoning neutrality and fully siding with the powers that fought the country's aggressor. In Sainte-Adresse, Broqueville paid lip service to the aspirations of these men and in the eyes of some of them he grew out to become the powerful leader that the nation needed.

Yet Sainte-Adresse was not the only centre of Belgian authority. Near the front in unoccupied Belgium, King Albert held very different ideas about the country's foreign policy. Believing that the war would end in a negotiated peace, he preferred to hold on to the policy of neutrality. Also Albert in a way justified his stance with democratic arguments. He believed that neutrality was the best means to achieve what the Belgian people wanted, namely an end to the war as soon and with as little Belgian casualties as possible. To achieve this goal, the King counted on Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, the country's top diplomat and Baron Léon van der Elst, the Foreign Ministry's leading official. In comparison with a decade earlier, a certain *renversement des alliances* had indeed taken place. While the latter half of Leopold II's reign was characterized by a strong ideological tie between the old King and the group of expansionist-minded, primarily junior diplomats, the war had made clear that the new King chose to ally himself with the remaining neutralist, primarily senior diplomats.

The game of chess between Broqueville and the King would determine the fate of many Belgian diplomats, not the least because it had a counterpart in the struggle between annexationists and neutralists inside the Foreign Ministry. Aware that the King held the power to divide and rule over the political class, Broqueville opened the game by working towards the removal of those of his political adversaries who were closest to Albert. Placing them at the head of some of the country's most prestigious legations, he eliminated a number of senior Belgian diplomats along the way. Before the war, these men had travelled quietly on the road to glory and had gathered tokens of prestige which had gained them the respect and acknowledgment of their peers. Their investments in time and money had yielded well. Suddenly, however, all this was taken away from them. Although many diplomats agreed that a number among them were just not up for the challenges of wartime diplomacy, the victims

and their colleagues perceived the measures as unjust and as coming from the world of politics, which many of them considered as inferior to their own world. This value judgment sprung from their conviction that politicians were driven by 'ambition', meaning that they selfishly served their own interests, and knew nothing about the more elevated ways of diplomacy. Diplomats, by contrast, saw themselves as professionals who with a sense of self-abnegation served the higher ideal of King and Country. In their opinion, only the King could judge whether they had served the Country rightly. Consequently, the victims of the political intrusion experienced the greatest disappointments when the royal acknowledgment of their services failed to occur.

Luckily for their colleagues, Albert's countermove consisted in investing Beyens with the functions of Foreign Minister. As head of the diplomatic personnel, Beyens would strain himself to safeguard the dignity of the diplomatic corps, which he believed possessed far better qualities to execute Belgian foreign policy than any of the country's elected politicians. The appointment of Beyens, Albert believed, would strengthen his position within the government. He knew that the senior diplomat shared his ideas and manifested an amount of deference to King and Country that he would not find among the members of the government. Yet Beyens's attachment to diplomatic norms and values also constituted his weakness in the world of politics. In the Introduction, I have termed diplomatic culture as the structure of meaning through which members of the diplomatic corps develop ideas, perceive interests, and act on both. This culture in a way limited Beyens's freedom of action in encounters with politicians whose moral and ethical framework allowed a wider range of Machiavellian and chameleon strategies. One such strategy that diplomats could not engage in was to set themselves up as courtiers in the presence of the King. This would jeopardize their professional honour and dignity. They indeed endeavoured to reconcile the wishes of the King and the government with what they believed was diplomatically possible and in the country's best interest. This required a certain freedom of action.

Broqueville was not bound by the same strictures. He resorted to courtly politics to monopolize communication lines to and from the sovereign, and eventually managed to convince Albert that he had given up his alliance with the nationalists in the Foreign Ministry, the press and the government. He also succeeded in making the King believe that Beyens had been disloyal. In a way, Broqueville had therefore resorted to a nationalist argument, claiming that his adversary's loyalty lay with the transnational diplomatic community, and more specifically with the French diplomat Jules Cambon, Beyens's close friend. At any rate, the King lost his trust in the diplomat and Broqueville became the new Foreign Minister.

The Cabinet Chief immediately set out to play a double game, presenting himself as a neutralist before the King and as an annexationist before the Congo generation diplomats, whose position of power within the Foreign Ministry he further consolidated. In the process, he seriously underestimated the agency of these men. The new Political Director Albert de Bassompierre and the new Secretary-General Pierre Orts indeed exercised a considerable influence on leading members of the government such as Jules Renkin and Paul Hymans. With the help of the 'flexible' diplomat Baron Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, they managed to topple Broqueville and to replace him with Hymans.

This event initiated the 'nationalist moment' in Belgian foreign policy. The last of the neutralists had been wiped out of the Foreign Ministry and the King was largely side-lined. The reins of Belgian foreign policy henceforth resided in the hands of the Political Director and the Secretary-General who determined its direction in consultation with the Foreign Minister. For a while, they seemed to believe that nothing would stop the realization of their nationalist aims. What eventually did stop them, however, was diplomatic reality and a new international political culture in which the rhetoric of annexationism could only damage their negotiating position. As a consequence of internal revolutions, the Foreign Ministry's leadership had too little experience in diplomacy. Orts, Bassompierre, and Hymans could claim all they wanted that the war had proven Belgium's adulthood and had thus entitled it to full membership of the concert of nations, but they did not realize enough that they themselves lacked the necessary diplomatic maturity.

The end of the nationalist moment more or less coincided with the end of the Paris Peace conference. At least partly, it lasted so long because for a long time the confrontation with public opinion failed to occur. The Foreign Ministry's ruling trio thus managed to convince the majority of the afterwar government that their policy corresponded to the wishes of the Belgian people and served the Belgian state's best interest. Moreover, for a long time they could count on the support of nationalist editors and journalists of powerful newspapers who lent their annexationist aims a certain democratic legitimacy. After the failure of Versailles, however, politicians and journalists could no longer ignore how little the public cared for a greater Belgium. As quickly as nationalism had come to occupy the centre of Belgian politics after the outbreak of war, so quickly would it return to the margins of the political world after the Summer of 1919.

Yet for Belgian diplomats this did not mean that everything turned back to the way it was. Before the war, diplomats only had to reckon with the King. After the war, they also had to reckon with the government and with public opinion. The First World War had indeed

accelerated the processes of democratization which were gradually taking the power over foreign policy, and thus over diplomats as its executors, away from the King and placing it in the hands of the government. Its members managed to hold on to this power but because they were elected, they had to reckon with the opinion of the public, which to a certain extent was guided by journalists and newspaper editors. They did for instance by at least partly meeting the wishes formulated by these journalists as to the organization of the diplomatic career, thus rendering Belgian diplomacy more fit to protect and further the country's (economic) interests. The role of the King, however, was not completely played out. In the field of domestic politics, his authority increased at the expense of the authority of politicians. The King's actions during and immediately after the war, and the glorifying press coverage they received, convinced large sections of an increasingly articulate public that the sovereign knew what was best for them and acted accordingly. That same public felt increasingly disillusioned in the political class, which manifested its impotence in parliamentary quarrels and unstable governments. Given the ever closer connection between domestic and international politics, it would be possible for the King to re-establish his authority in foreign policy making, especially in the changing international political culture of the 1930s.

In the world of diplomacy, the vanishing of nationalism as the inspiration of Belgian foreign policy was epitomized by the departure of Orts and Bassompierre and by the simultaneous return of Beyens. Not long after the outbreak of war, Beyens had become aware of the growing importance of public opinion as an actor in foreign policy making. Through the many writings he published he interacted with the public, first with an international public in order to further his country's interests, then with a domestic public in order to counter the personal attacks he had to endure and thus to restore his reputation, and ultimately with both publics in order to point to the dangerous intrusions of politicians in the world of diplomacy. In combination with the succession of diplomatic failures attributed to politicians since Versailles, Beyens grew out to become a symbol of diplomatic wisdom with whom the same politicians gladly associated themselves. His new status gained him the title of ambassador in one of Belgian diplomacy's most comfortable postings and allowed him to conclude his career in an honourable manner.

Yet just how representative was the case of Beyens for the wider Belgian diplomatic corps? Several diplomats manifested their desire to take part in the public debate about their profession, but very few actually did. Several diplomats who, like Beyens, were eliminated because of their neutralist stance managed to return into active service, but none of them ended their career as an ambassador. Beyens's career led him from the country's most

prestigious posting before the war to the Foreign Minister's office after a period of unemployment, and then after another period of unemployment to one of the country's newly founded embassies. This exceptional path had a fundamental impact on his relations with politicians and the press.

While his final posting was honourable enough for a diplomat with his professional history, Beyens might have preferred to end his career in one of the truly top embassies of the interwar period. At the time of his death in early 1934, these functions were held by Gaiffier, who still led the Paris embassy, and by Baron Emile de Cartier de Marchienne, who occupied the London embassy from 1927 onwards. These were diplomats who throughout their careers had never collided with the King, had successfully adapted to the styles of each of the successive Foreign Ministers under which they served, and had never encountered press criticisms about the way they executed their profession. In the mid-1930s these were the diplomats whose pictures covered the front pages of Belgian newspapers. These were Davignon's mysterious foreign policy experts.

In international politics, social skills and professional knowledge still significantly contributed to the success of diplomats. On the domestic scene, however, their success largely depended on the extent to which they could convince the sovereign of their loyalty, the politicians of their flexibility, and the public of their heroism. Perhaps the most successful diplomats were the ones who managed to adopt a self-effacing stance not in the execution of Belgian foreign policy but in their relations with the King, the politicians and the public. Such self-effacement allowed the King to affirm his authority over foreign policy, enabled the politicians to shine in international politics and conferred diplomats a certain mystical lustre in the eyes of the public.

The same self-effacement at least partly explains why diplomats like Gaiffier and Cartier only played supporting roles in this story, which essentially dealt with the place of diplomacy within the Belgian political system. Had this story dealt with the diplomats' core activities, that is with how they defended the country's interests in foreign postings, these men would probably have been protagonists. In the framework of the story that I have written, they mostly operated in the shadows, aware of the threat to traditional diplomacy that came from the temporary joining of forces by the worlds of politics and the press but at the same time successfully adapting to it and managing to preserve a certain continuity in diplomatic culture. The main characters of this story were the diplomats who – forcibly or not – stood up to fight for a certain ideal of Belgian diplomacy as a practice (in the case of Beyens) and as a policy (in both the case of Beyens and the cases of Orts and Bassompierre). They actively negotiated

with both the government and the King over the relationship between the realms of politics and diplomacy. This had a decisive impact on their individual career paths and on the making and execution of Belgian foreign policy.

The discussion of the protagonists of this story brings the man with whom it started back in the picture. Count André de Kerchove de Denterghem was yet another type of diplomat than Beyens, Orts and Bassompierre, or Gaiffier and Cartier. The mystery that Davignon ascribed to these men did not certainly not apply to him. In a way, Kerchove was a diplomat conditioned by democratization. Before the war, he had wanted to become a politician but the changing field of politics drove him towards diplomacy. Aware of the intrusions of politicians into the world of diplomacy after the war, Kerchove had left active service in the rank of advisor in early 1921 and finally became a politician, serving as a provincial governor for eight years followed by three years as a senator. Having – by a very narrow margin – lost the struggle for the Foreign Ministership to his fellow party member Hymans, Kerchove demanded one of the country's top diplomatic postings in exchange for not setting up a political party which, the Liberals feared, would seriously undermine their power base. In late 1931, he asked for Berlin and immediately got it, thus provoking an unforeseen diplomatic movement. Kerchove had indeed internalized the politicians' habitus very well and used it against them to resume and further his diplomatic career. Although he did not particularly manifest any self-effacement in his relations with the Foreign Minister, after a few years he obtained his promotion to the Belgian embassy in Paris.¹⁷⁴⁸

From the French capital, however, Kerchove had to face the return of the King to Belgian diplomacy. Albert had died in 1934 and was succeeded by his son, who mounted the throne as Leopold III and reaffirmed his authority over foreign policy making. With the aid of several senior diplomats, Leopold III managed to steer Belgium back to international neutrality. Kerchove's refusal to abide the policy change in a way heralded a new epoch in the history of Belgian diplomatic culture, one which fundamentally impacted the position of Belgian diplomats in the changing triangular relation between the King, the government, and (in the long run) the public.¹⁷⁴⁹ That story still has to be written.

¹⁷⁴⁸ See ARA, T 225, "Papiers de Borchgrave", n° 299, Fernand Vanlangenhove to Roger de Borchgrave, 7 December 1931; and BOELENS, *Correspondentie*, passim.

¹⁷⁴⁹ ADCB, 1936-1937, 236-237. On Kerchove's conflict with the King, see STENGERS, Jean, *De Koningen der Belgen. Macht en invloed. Van 1830 tot nu*, Leuven, 1992, 144-145. On the relation of diplomats with the public in the postwar period, see AUWERS, Michael, and Nevra BILTEKIN, "La diplomatie en mémoires. Étude sur les mémoires de diplomates belges et suédois du 20e siècle", in Laurence BADEL, et. al. (eds.), *Écrivains et diplomates*, 181-192.

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123. Comte Frédéric (Fritz) van den Steen de Jehay, diplomate, chef de cabinet du roi. Et lettres du baron Beyens, de Bassompierre, lieutenant J. de Lespinay, G. Helleputte, comtesse de Merode et comtesse Henriette van de Steen de Jehay. Minutes de réponses et notes de van der Elst, 1884-1918.
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177. Lettres du baron Beyens, juillet-août 1917.
178. Lettre de H. Costermans, secrétaire général du ministère des Affaires étrangères (et une annexe), juillet 1919
183. Lettres du comte Frédéric van den Steen de Jehay, chef de cabinet du Roi. Et minutes de réponses de L. van der Elst ainsi qu'une note relative à la neutralité, 1917-1918.
188. Polémique autour du vol, par les Allemands de documents, au ministère des Affaires étrangères à Bruxelles pendant la première guerre mondiale. Correspondance à ce sujet, 1919-1923. Et une documentation réunie à ce sujet par L. van der Elst (1915-1917)
275. Ecrits divers de L. van der Elst, s.d.

Papiers J. Van den Heuvel (T 034)

99. Nomination. Correspondance; arrêté royal du 28 février; lettre de créances 28 février, en copie

Papiers de Henry Carton de Wiart (I 223)

659. Broqueville, Charles, comte de -, 1910, 1911, 1913, 1914, 1917, 1918, 1923, 1927 ; s.d.
1089. Charles de Broqueville, 27 août 1918
1091. Jules Destrée : Londres, 14 janvier 1915 ; s.d. ; Paris, 4 janvier 1916 ; s.d. ; Italie – Rome ou Milan -, 18 février 1916 ; s.d.

Papiers de Groote (I 222)

30. Nomination en qualité d'envoyé extraordinaire et ministre plénipotentiaire à Berne: gestion de la légation, différend avec le ministre des Affaires Etrangères, le baron de Broqueville, mise à la disposition du ministre des Affaires Etrangères, départ de Suisse, lettres de regret et de remerciements, 1912-1918.
87. Communication entre l'Ambassade à Berne et le Ministère des Affaires Etrangères à Bruxelles et au Havre notamment avec le baron Beyens, ministre

des Affaires Etrangères, concernant les finances de la légation, les problèmes de personnel, la neutralité suisse, la propagande luxembourgeoise en Suisse pour sauvegarder l'indépendance du Grand-Duché, 1911-1917.

88. Affaires traitées à Berne: internés belges, avances faites à des Belges, propagande belge en Suisse, différend entre Paul de Grootte et le Colonel Lefébure, attaché militaire, affaires concernant les services de renseignements traités par le sous-lieutenant Feron, 1914-1917 (1919).

102. Baron Eugène Beyens, 1899-1917.

124. Henry Carton de Wiart, 1916-1917.

145. Baron Georges van der Elst, 1915-1916.

154. Ed. de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, 1914-1918.

168. Baron Gustave Guillaume, 1914-1915.

177. Jules van den Heuvel, 1914-1918.

238. Fernand Peltzer, 1917-1918.

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613. Politiek leven te Le Havre, regeringswijzigingen; incidenten (Beyens – Renkin) – Koning – Politieke en vertrouwelijke nota's

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103. Systèmes diplomatiques et consulaires. Diplomatie et consulats

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12.926. Procès-verbaux de la Commission du Personnel Extérieur

12.937. Réorganisation des corps diplomatiques et consulaires

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15.911. Services extérieurs 1858-1919

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0022. Philippe de Beaufort

0031. Eugène-Napoléon Beyens

0050. Conrad de Buisseret-Steenbecque de Blarenghien

0062. Emile de Cartier de Marchienne

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0107. Maximilien d'Erp

0109. Gaston Errebault de Dudzeele

0113. Albéric Fallon

0122. Albert Garnier Heldewier

0136. Albéric Grenier

0139. Paul de Grootte

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0147. Emmanuel Havenith

0186. Raymond Leghait

0216. Emile de Meester de Ravestein
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1311. Gaston de Ramaix
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1415. Albert de Ligne
1418. Fernand Peltzer
1421. Charles Symon
1425. Maximilien van Ypersele de Strihou
1426. Léon Lemaire de Warzée d'Hermalle
1514. Albert de Bassompierre
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1523. Bernard de l'Escaille
1524. Gustave Guillaume
1525. Joseph Herry
1526. Guy Heyndrickx
1529. André de Kerchove de Denterghem
1531. Baudouin de Lichtervelde
1535. Pierre Orts
1536. Georges de Raymond
1559. Charles de Romrée de Vichenet,
1779. Henry Borel de Bitche.
1812. Ernest Kervyn de Meerendré
2282. Pol Le Tellier
2353. Eugène de Ligne
4699. Georges Allart
4853. Paul May
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- 12.481. Papiers Beyens
21. "Lettres du Roi Albert 1910-1912"
22. Guerre de 1914-1918 : Lettres de Broqueville, autres ministres et personnalités

- 23. Correspondance principalement du roi Albert
- 25. Correspondance avec Mercier
- 26. Lettres avec Roi, ca. 1911-1912
- 27a. Correspondance particulière du Baron Beyens avec les ministres des Affaires Etrangères, 1922-1925 (Rome)
- 44. Baron Guillaume et Affaire van den Bulcke
- 48. Correspondance du Baron Beyens après sa démission du gouvernement
- 50. Lettres écrites après le départ du Havre (1917-1918)
- 51. Correspondance avec des diplomates belges et des fonctionnaires du Département des Affaires Etrangères
- 52. Correspondance avec diverses personnes
- 60. Documents appartenants au Baron Beyens
- 62. Deux politiques – Réponse à Pierre Nothomb
- 65. Journal ‘Mon ambassade à Rome’
- 70. Correspondance du Baron Beyens à son épouse 1919

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- 33/3. Eugène Beyens, 1914-1931 [olim II.N.200; P.200]
- 47. Albert de Bassompierre
- 108. Fernand Peltzer, 1918-1920, 1921-1930
- 650. Cuvelier, 1921-1924, 1934
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- 973. Correspondance avec l’ambassade belge à Athènes, 1921-1933

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- III/B/3/5/1. Stukken betreffende de Belgische vertegenwoordiging in het buitenland, 1919-1922

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- 35. de Broqueville
- 64. Guillaume
- 71. Hymans
- 105. Orts
- 225. 1918
- 259. Projet d’instructions aux chefs de missions diplomatiques belges au sujet du statut politique international futur de la Belgique, 2 september 1918.
- 269. Beyens, note sur les “Conditions de paix”, juillet 1917
- 293. Diplomates belges
- 586. Remaniement ministériel (correspondance de novembre 1917 – janvier 1918)

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APPENDICES

1. DE KERCHOVE, André and Marguerite, *Faut-il rester en diplomatie ?*, 23 April 1911

Faut-il rester en diplomatie?

Le 23 avril 1911

Il me semble qu'il convient de diviser ce petit "schéma de vie" en 4 parties: I) Avantages de la Carrière II) Désavantages III) Avantages de la vie en Belgique IV) Ses désavantages. Je désire que sur la ½ feuille qui reste blanche, ma petite Maggie, après mûres réflexions, y dépose ses observations, objections ou remarques

I Avantages de la diplomatie

a) Au point de vue matériel

La Carrière nous donnera par an d'abord 3000, ensuite vers 30 ans 5000 frs; de 35-43 ans, 10-12000 frs.

Comme ministre, nous devons compter pendant les 10 premières années une moyenne de 25000 frs par an.

Quand nous aurons 53 ans; nous toucherons, dans un grand poste une soixantaine de mille frs.

Nos revenus seront, à la fin de notre vie, entre 250 et 300.000 frs, car on ne peut compter sur les économies à venir.

Maggie : Au point de vue matériel, je n'y vois aucun avantage, bien au contraire.

b) Au point de vue intellectuel, social etc.

La Carrière nous fait mener une vie très brillante ; elle nous ouvre toutes les portes et nous amène à voir la « Society » dans tous les postes. Nous n'avons à nous occuper en rien, de la politique intérieure des pays où nous sommes. La C. nous éloigne des pays où, par les traditions, mon nom et mes goûts passionnément de justice et de liberté de pensée, nous serons amenés plus ou moins à nous occuper de politique intérieure.

Nous avons en la C. un champ très vaste de l'observation, la vie des grands centres intellectuels, que fatalement nous ne trouverons pas aussi facilement en Belgique. En diplomatie, on est entouré d'un halo de gloire et devenir ministre est l'ambition, et

plus d'un rêve d'assouvir. Je crois que notre intellectualité se fera beaucoup mieux en diplomatie, comme se trouvant moins ramenée aux idées mesquines et étroites de notre petit pays. La vie diplomatique est, certes, une vie excessivement alléchante pour une jeune femme.

Je crois avoir en moi, l'étoffe pour parvenir à marquer dans la Carrière. En toi, il y a une esquisse « diplomate », car tu en as le tact et le doigté. Nous ne devons pas, je crois, craindre des postes trop éloignés de Bruxelles, d'abord parce que j'agiterai le spectre du départ, ensuite à cause de notre situation d'homme marié. Il n'y a que notre 1^{er} poste de ministre qui sera fatalement un trou, ainsi qu'aussi un de nos postes de secrétaire. Nous avons tous deux l'esprit d'aventure et de voyages, l'esprit hanté de sortir de notre milieu. Nous évitons des heurts avec Maman et autres membres de la famille.

Maggie : Il y a en effet une petite gloriole et des portes ouvertes dans la « Society », mais, les connaissances et les amis que l'on se fait, sont passagers, et au bout d'un certain laps de temps, il faut partir pour une autre ville où l'on doit fatalement recommencer à se créer un nouveau cercle. Evidemment le contact avec de nombreuses personnes totalement différentes, d'autres pays, d'autres mœurs, nous ouvre un plus grand horizon d'idées que la vie plus tranquille qu'on est fatalement amené à vivre dans son propre pays ; mais, je crois , qu'en menant sa vie le plus intellectuellement possible, et en faisant de temps en temps un grand voyage, qui vous sorte complètement de votre cadre et de votre milieu, plutôt que de petits voyages qui vous laissent une impression fugitive, il y a très bien moyen d'éviter cette espèce de somnolence de l'esprit qui doit s'emparer de ceux qui n'essaient pas de voir et surtout d'étudier autre chose, en dehors de leur propre cadre. L'étoffe diplomatique que nous avons en nous ne sera jamais perdue car, n'importe où l'on se trouve, ce sont des qualités utiles, pour lesquelles on a un usage courant sans avoir besoin pour cela d'être à l'étranger !

- c) Avenir Je pourrai être ministre à 43 ans et peut-être (3) arriver comme d'Arschot au Palais, mais ce dernier point est on ne peut plus problématique.

II Désavantages de la Carrière

- a) Au point de vue matériel

La vie en Carrière coûte horriblement cher ; tu as pu voir, que, même en restreignant nos dépenses, si je compte les notes de fin d'année, nous dépenserons 72-75.000 frs. Donc toutes nos revenus actuels. Il est évident qu'avec 2 enfants et ménage, installation etc. Nous arriverons très vite à 100.000 frs, si nous voulons vivre comme nous en sommes habitués. Loin de faire des économies, nous serons amenés à entamer notre capital et à laisser ainsi un capital amoindri à nos enfants. Ce n'est pas mon traitement de diplomate qui changera quelque chose, car il est insignifiant jusqu'à notre dernier poste. Et serons-nous en état de jouir de notre position privilégiée alors, après avoir été +- gêné toute notre vie ?

Nos enfants pourront rester avec nous jusqu'à l'âge de 9 ou 10 ans, instruits par toi et des professeurs. Ensuite, grand partisan de l'école en commun, ils devront ou bien être mis en pension, ou bien chez une personne quelconque de nos familles respectives pour faire leurs études aux Athénées ou Universités.

Bien qu'étant très proches de Br., tu vois déjà combien difficilement nous tenons de nous absenter et jusqu'au poste de ministre, il n'est pas possible, à moins de causes graves (décès etc.) d'obtenir plus de 2 mois de congé. Dans la plupart des postes, il y a des mois malsains ou désagréables où, pour la santé des enfants et la tienne, tu seras obligée, malgré ton bon vouloir, de me quitter et de me laisser seul. Cela est inévitable ! Toi et moi, nous trouvons qu'il faut vivre en commun la vie conjugale.

Mes parents sont tous deux âgés. Ma mère s'est faite à l'idée de me voir partir, la tienne aussi. Mais je crois que, des 2 côtés, ils aimeront assez se voir entourer par nous dans leurs vieux jours. Cela amènera bien ses corvées et des ennuis, mais c'est un peu notre devoir. Juliette est quelque peu « faible d'esprit », il convient donc de surveiller sa fortune qui d'après les volontés de tous, doit nous revenir ou à nos enfants.

L'éloignement y mettra obstacle.

Nous aimons les voyages ; la Carr nous empêche d'en faire, car on est rivié à un poste et les congés sont employés dans les familles. Toutefois il convient d'envisager que la présence d'enfants nous rendait bien plus sédentaires et nous empêchera de nous absenter pour aussi loin et aussi longtemps que nous le désirions.

Maggie : Il n'est évidemment pas possible de continuer à dépenser comme nous le faisons ; ce serait à l'avenir non seulement une continuelle restriction pour nous, mais encore, il me semble manquer envers nos enfants, qui seront dans une position

presque gênée, et de tout cela je ne vois pour nous-mêmes un avantage vraiment sérieuse.

L'éloignement du pays est un grand ennui pour l'éducation des enfants, lorsqu'elle devient vraiment sérieuse. De plus, je crois, que cette vie toujours mondaine et vagabonde n'est pas l'exemple qui convient aux enfants, qui grandissent sans savoir ce que c'est qu'une « Patrie » et un véritable « Home ».

La question climat est aussi sérieuse ; les séparations sont presque inévitables naturellement, et je suis tout à fait de l'avis, que les séparations sont mauvaises à plusieurs points de vue (question d'affection à part) et de plus que lorsqu'on a des enfants c'est absolument déplorable.

Il faut « a head » and « a man » pour diriger ta fortune et la mienne. Il n'y a que toi pour cette tâche, qui est presque un devoir.

Les voyages sont choses excellentes à mon avis, question d'agrément à part, et quoique naturellement plus retenus, nous le serons cependant moins que par la carrière.

b) Au point de vue social, intellectuel

Je n'y vois que des avantages ; le seul « hic » est de se recréer un centre tous les 2 ou 3 ans ; et de devoir pour cela emballer, déballer etc. à l'état permanent.

(5) De plus dans les grands postes, tu as pu voir combien peu vaut la qualité de « diplomate ». Nous avons néanmoins assez d'atouts dans notre jeu pour nous faire cette position. Lorsque nous reviendrons au pays, nous serons des déracinés, oubliés à Gand et à Bruxelles, et nos enfants seront obligés de se faire leur chemin, tout comme les Guillaume. Tu n'as pas de frère et de sœur ; quant à moi, ma famille n'est pas assez puissante pour être un help sérieux pour nos enfants.

Maggie : L'avantage est trop léger pour peser dans la balance. Les attachés au pays sont il me semble trop fortes pour être totalement brisées, surtout comme tu n'as pas de frère et considérant l'avenir de tes enfants.

III Avantages de la vie en Belgique

a) Au point de vue matériel

Notre vie nous coûtera en Belgique de 40 à 50000 frs par an, avec enfants, car dès lors, il y aura des dépenses comme « voyages, monde » qui diminueront. Grâce à la finance, je puis, endéans de 5 ans, me faire 10 à 15000 en frais d'administration. Notre

fortune mieux gérée, rapportera plus et nous devons payer moins d'intermédiaires. J'estime que nous pouvons faire maintenant 20 à 3000 frs d'économies par an ; et par la suite, atteindre assez aisément la somme de 300 000 frs de rente. Tant en diplomatie, je dois donner ma démission de toute autre source de revenus que mon traitement.

Etant en Belgique, nous pouvons vivre ensemble toujours ; nos enfants seront élevés sous notre surveillance et leur instruction se continuera normalement.

Nous serons près de nos parents et, avec la saison mondaine à Gand, à Bruxelles, l'été à Beervelde et Nieupoort, nous pouvons avoir une saison très agréable. Si nous sommes fatigués de la vie factice et vide du Monde, nous pouvons partir en voyage lointaine.

Nous avons des personnes thrustful pour reprendre les gosses.

Nous avons Beervelde, bien familial qu'en diplomatie, il me semble difficile de reprendre. Nous sommes libres enfin de tous nos actes et personne n'a rien à nous contrôler.

Nous vivrons en gens paisibles une vie très « bourgeoisie », très « popote » , mais qui ne manquerait peut-être pas d'agrément. Le bonheur est souvent dans une vie sans trop d'apparat et d'extérieur.

Avenir Je ne prévois pas que la politique militante me convienne, ni que je lui convienne. Pour le moment, le vent est à la démocratie ou démagogie. Laissons le souffler ! Il faudra un jour que l'on en revienne à un parti dirigeant intellectuel et non plus à des « chasseurs de mandat ». Ce jour-là, je me présenterai. La tradition de ma famille est depuis plus d'un siècle le libéralisme, modéré, mais avant tout le libéralisme. La fait d'appartenir à l'aristocratie et à une élite intelligente ne s'accorde pas avec un gouvernement des masses populaires. Il viendra un moment où les classes aristocratiques intelligentes (dans lesquelles je comprends surtout les familles de la haute bourgeoisie comme celle de ma mère et la tienne) reprendront le pouvoir. Ce jour sera mon jour. En attendant, je (7) ne veux pas être oublié. Donc on me verra dans les rangs passifs du parti, mais parmi eux. J'aurai aussi une situation exceptionnelle : laissant venir à moi qui me plaît et ne dépendant de personne. A Gand, cette situation existe déjà ; à Bruxelles, elle est tout à créer, et c'est la raison pourquoi je fus ni opposé à l'habitation pendant longtemps au 22.

A Bruxelles, nous devons nous attendre à un « folle » de l'aristocratie ultramontaine qui me rejettera avec plaisir. Seuls les gens intelligents, et il y en a parmi les plus hautes classes, nous verront. Peut-être que seules quelques douairières regimberont ! Il

faut cependant que l'on sache que le point de vue mondain ne me fera reculer en quoique ce soit ou pactiser avec mes actes et principes. Je ne brûlerai pas mes vaisseaux, mais évidemment je resterai le fidèle opposant de mes Pères. Nous pouvons aisément nous former un salon éclectique, littéraire, etc.

Nous sommes en position de la faire. Grâce à notre position, nous pourrons suivre tout évènement littéraire ou artistique et nous déplacer aussi souvent que nous le voudrons. Tu peux briller ainsi d'un éclat autre et bien plus difficile à obtenir, puisqu'il est basé sur la seule puissance de soi, si tu veux comprendre ton rôle. Si un gouvernement libéral arrive, lorsque j'aura 30-35 ans, nous aurons probablement un gouvernement. A 40 ans, je tâcherai de devenir sénateur et personne ne peut savoir, si le ministère Davignon ne nous sera pas ouvert un jour. C'est là un avenir impossible à prévoir, mais possible. Je m'occuperai de littérature et d'affaires et te laisserai le soin, sous mes conseils, de te faire un salon, en non d'en ouvrir les portes. Je ne veux pas être le Mr qui court la rue pour être invité chez Mr ou Me X ; peu me chaut de les voir s'ils sont ennuyeux même ultra-chics. S'ils sont intelligents, ils demanderont déjà assez vite à me voir.

Nous pouvons donc viser à un agrément personnel très grand, et un avenir tout aussi grand si les destins politiques le veulent.

Maggie : L'avantage matériel est immense, et grâce à la finance où tu pourras entrer, et à la vie moins coûteuse, nous pourrons jouir beaucoup plus de notre fortune, en en ayant beaucoup plus d'agrément et grâce aux économies faire un avenir à nos enfants. Leur éducation sera bien meilleure et notre vie sera tant plus unie car la vie ensemble amène de jour en jour une plus grande compréhension l'un de l'autre.

Nous avons certe de quoi varier notre vie et l'empêcher de devenir monotone et Beirvelde il me semble, doit être repris par toi.

On se fatigue d'un joug quelqu'il soit ; jamais de la liberté. La vie intime a beaucoup d'agrément et elle a un fond de bonheur véritable qu'on cherche inutilement en dehors. La seule chose à éviter c'est l'égoïsme somnolent qui dérive parfois d'une vie trop popotte, mais que toi et moi nous saurons éviter j'en suis certaine.

La politique du moment ne me semble certe pas te convenir. Ton caractère est trop franc, trop loyal pour s'accorder avec le vent qui souffle pour le moment. En t'épousant, je savais tes opinions et, je t'ai épousé ... que cela te suffise. Je n'oublierai

jamais que je suis ta femme. Tu me connais assez pour comprendre tout le sens très grand que je donne à cette phrase.

Je ne doute pas que Bruxelles nous réserve des heurts, néanmoins, comme ils nous viendront d'indifférents, ce ne serait jamais plus que l'ennui d'un instant, vite oublié dans la ressource en nous-mêmes et dans le cercle que nous pouvons nous créer. En tous cas n'exagérons rien, attendons, voyons, et ne t'imagines pas que parce que l'on te saura un « fidèle » aux opinions de ta race, tout le monde te dédaignera au contraire. Les vieilles matrones, les belle-mères manquées et les gens étroits d'idées, oui évidemment mais ne crois pas à une règle totale et générale.

La course aux invitations est la chose que je hais le plus, et que je ne ferai jamais, les dispositions littéraires tu ne dois pas abandonner.

IV Désagréments de la vie en Belgique

a) Matériel

Aucun ; l'argent affluerait. Nous serions libres. Le seul ennui possible est la présence très proche de Maman qui amènerait peut-être des froissements. Il est vrai de dire que nous vivons tant plus dans ma famille et surtout notre vie intime

Maggie : La présence de Maman est une chose à éviter par le tact, et je crois que tout doucement nous parviendrons à éviter les heurts.

b) Moral etc.

Le point de vue mondain est évidemment le seul, si pas l'unique ennui. Il est évident que m'ayant épousé, tout en ayant conservé (et j'y veille avec jalousie) tes idées personnelles, tu es amenée à soutenir mes opinions là où les circonstances les mènent. Les fêtes de charité ; listes de souscriptions, présence à certaines festivités. Dans ma situation et portant mon nom, il faut se montrer et donner de l'argent ne suffit pas. Il est évident que tout cela ne plaira pas au point de vue « purement mondain ».

Mais ce que nous aurons, c'est d'être entouré, même par nos ennemis, d'un respect très grand. Nos amis nous mèneront au pavois et nous n'aurons pas la réputation de « chèvrechoutiste » qui amène une réprobation et un discrédit sur toutes les personnes non franchement fidèles à leurs idées.

La vie à Gand est évidemment plus morne et moins brillante qu'en diplomatie ; elle est plus solide et stable.

Maggie : L'unique ennui, qui est si infime. Je te sais trop bon, trop vrai et trop large d'idées, pour froisser les convictions très sincères que j'ai quant à moi, une fois encore je n'oublierai jamais que je suis ta femme et devenue une Kerchove par mon union avec toi.

A Gand, comme à Bruxelles, je puis et saurai me faire une vie. Tout dépend de toi, non de la vile dans laquelle on vit.

Conclusions

Je ne parle que pour mémoire des 2 examens que la diplomatie me coûteraient. Je trouve que dans une question aussi importante que notre avenir de toute notre vie, une étude ne devait pas entrer en ligne de compte. Il faut aussi qu'une fois notre décision prise, nous la soumettions à Papa pour savoir si des empêchements matériels, que j'ignore maintenant, ne nous empêchent de partir.

Bref, le dilemme se pose, dans ce bref aperçu, comme ceci :

La diplomatie nous donne au point de vue intellectuel, social, etc beaucoup de gloire, gloriole et satisfaction de vanités. Elle nous permet d'ouvrir nos intelligences à des champs les plus divers. Mais nous ne sommes pas libres de nos mouvements.

Au point de vue matériel elle est déplorable quant à la fortune, car elle amoindrit notre patrimoine.

La vie en Belgique, au point de vue matériel, est satisfaisante, nous permettant d'agrandir notre avoir.

Au point de vue social etc. elle est beaucoup moins propice. Toujours nous serons +- « outlaws » et cependant nous pouvons nous faire une position exceptionnelle, mais par nous-mêmes. Les vies à Gand et à Bruxelles amènent la liberté entière de nos existences, mais donnent une vie beaucoup moins brillante.

Maggie :

Conclusion

Je crois que sans hésitation nous devons abandonner la carrière, qui pour un peu de gloire donne moins de bonheur vrai, pour un peu de vie mondaine avec des étrangers, nous fait boulier dans notre propre patrie, parmi nos amis, et notre famille et ou s'il y a moins d'avantage il y a surtout la chose principale qui le rappelle : Le Devoir.

2. Dutch Abstract

Deze studie onderzoekt hoe processen van democratisering zich hebben gemanifesteerd in de evolutie van de diplomatieke cultuur. Ze richt zich daarbij op het Belgische diplomatieke corps als gevalstudie en bestudeert de sociale en professionele praktijken en vertogen van de leden van dat corps. Op die manier werpt ze een licht op een fundamentele fase in de overgang die het diplomatieke corps heeft doorgemaakt van een Europese, aristocratische broederschap naar de internationale, meritocratische elite die het vandaag is. Daarnaast draagt deze studie bij aan ons inzicht in het onderhandelingsproces tussen wat zou kunnen omschreven worden als ‘premoderne’ en ‘moderne’ manieren om de internationale betrekkingen op te vatten en te organiseren.

Deze studie bestrijkt de jaren tussen ruwweg 1885 en 1935. In deze periode brachten met name verschillende uitbreidingen van het stemrecht en de opkomst van de massamedia in België een gevoelige verruiming van de politieke democratie teweeg. Dit zorgde ervoor dat, om Aristoteles en zijn theorie van de gemengde regeringsvorm te parafraseren, de triangulaire relatie tussen de ene, de weinigen en de velen aanzienlijk veranderde, zowel op het vlak van de binnenlandse als op dat van de buitenlandse politiek. In dit verhaal is de ene de Belgische Koningen, zijn de weinigen de Belgische regeringsleden en de velen het Belgische publiek, wiens opinies over diplomaten en diplomatie voornamelijk werden vertolkt in het parlement en in de pers. Deze studie onderzoekt de veranderende relatie tussen die drie polen vanuit het perspectief van de Belgische diplomaten, die zeker in het begin van deze periode heel dicht bij de ene stonden. De associatie van de Koningen en de diplomaten kwam echter onder druk in de nasleep van de twee belangrijkste episoden uit de Belgische diplomatieke geschiedenis van de onderzochte tijdspanne. Het gaat dan over de verwerving van een kolonie door Koning Leopold II in 1885 en over de Eerste Wereldoorlog, die uitbrak in 1914. Zij het met een verschillende intensiteit, hadden beide episoden een impact op democratiseringsprocessen in België.