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FRAMED IN TIMES OF DEMOCRATIZATION

The changing representation of Belgian diplomats in the newspaper press, 1890s-1930s

In Autumn 1935, in a column in Belgium's leading political magazine, 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?' (*Revue générale*, October 7, 1935) Davignon knew the world of diplomacy well. At his time of writing, his brother was a rising star in the Belgian *corps diplomatique*, while Henri himself had worked as the private secretary of his father, who was Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1907 and 1915. Remarkably enough, Davignon did not answer his question until the end of the article. Filling his text with details about diplomatic life in Brussels before the First World War, he did not say anything about how the public image of diplomats evolved between the start of the war and his time of writing. Why?

Reading the literature on the changing nature of international relations in the early twentieth century, one could suspect that these were times that Davignon, as an insider, did not like to remember. Since the late nineteenth century, the rise of the mass media – among other manifestations of a democratizing society – had indeed made Western diplomats increasingly aware of a twofold criticism directed towards them. On the one hand, several journalists, publicists, and parliamentarians voiced a 'populist/nativist hostility to professional diplomats as suspiciously cosmopolitan, too sympathetic to foreigners, smooth-talking and sly.' On the other hand, more such writers became convinced that these elitist and mysterious functionaries were responsible for the drift towards war. They argued for a new kind of diplomacy, based on publicity and co-operation between peoples. These criticisms stimulated the creation of the League of Nations and the rise of conference diplomacy after the war. Dominated by democratically elected politicians who conferred with an eye to the international press, these institutions threatened to put traditional diplomats on the side lines.[1]

From this literature, we know that many diplomats of the larger European states disagreed with the new ways of publicly conducting international relations. They had analyzed events leading to the Great War differently, deeming that peace had been broken by the mismanagement of public sentiment by politicians and journalists. At the same time, diplomats had long been forced to face

the harsh reality of the mediatization of their core business, as journalists and politicians had turned the realm of international politics into a transnational battle field where the rules of the game were increasingly determined by different kinds of media logic.[2] We know surprisingly little about how professional diplomats - arguably the main managers of the international relations - were represented in these media, and about how they adapted to these new realities.

Addressing this lacuna, this study contributes to the growing literature at the intersection of new diplomatic history and media studies. In recent years, historians have examined the activities of journalists as actors in international relations, but considerably less attention has gone to how these pressmen perceived and represented those whose realm they were intruding upon. Moreover, historical analyses of both the mediatization of diplomatic personae and diplomats' reactions to their media representations, are virtually nonexistent.[3] At the same time, political and communication scientists have developed useful theories and concepts about how and when diplomatic actors adapt to media logic. Yet they recognize the need for more empirical and historical case studies in order to test these theories and concepts, and push the discussion of mediatization forward.[4]

This article seeks to further this debate by focusing on the case of Belgium, a small state which was neutral on the European scene but became a belligerent during the war, and a long-time liberal democracy noted for the freedom of its press.[5] Like most European countries, the Belgian state disposed of a largely aristocratic diplomatic corps, between two-thirds and three quarters of its members belonging to the nobility (and the others coming from urban high society).[6] Journalists were recruited in wider sections of the population, and mainly came from petty bourgeois families of merchants, artisans, and civil service clerks.[7]

Combining extensive research into BelgicaPress, the Belgian digitized newspaper database, with close readings of the personnel files, diaries, and private letters of Belgian diplomats, this essay investigates how before, during, and after the First World War, these men were depicted in Belgian newspapers, and how they perceived and reacted to these representations.[8] I will also look at the occurrence and/or co-existence of certain frames used by journalists to stereotype diplomats, and evaluate how changes in Belgian foreign policy and European politics altered framing strategies throughout this period.[9]

Debauched cosmopolitans?

In his column on diplomacy and diplomats, 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.' This was not exactly true. Searching Belgian newspapers published in the decades before 1914, one comes across hundreds of articles mockingly depicting diplomats as an outdated elite that only spent the taxpayer's money instead of furthering Belgian economic interests abroad.

One particularly vivid piece was published in the early 1890s in *Le Soir,* Belgium's most influential *penny* newspaper.[10] After complaining about diplomats' long stints abroad, which allegedly turned them into 'strangers' to their country, 'Bob' the journalist recommended that diplomats sojourn at least one year out of three 'amongst us, in order not to forget us, us and our industry.' As a diplomat's answer to the question what he did all day, Bob wrote:

> 'To tell you the truth, around ten o'clock, they bring me my hot chocolate, which I have in bed while reading the newspapers; 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. My evenings are spent in the theatre, afterwards I go to the club to play some cards, that is if my colleagues and I are not supping in merry company… And that's it!'

The journalist 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!' (*Le Soir*, April 24, 1891)

The narrative strategy adopted by this journalist is both common and slightly exceptional among the many mass press representations of Belgian diplomats before the turn of the twentieth century. Common is the simultaneous existence of what communication scientists have labelled 'morality' and 'economic' frames within one text.[11] In selecting which perceived aspects of the diplomatic profession to make more salient, many journalists indeed chose to represent Belgian diplomats as debouched cosmopolitans whose idleness and disdain for economic matters could well have consequences for the country's trade balance. Common in Belgian newspapers before the turn of the century is also the absence of a so-called 'attribution of responsibility' frame.

Contrary to criticisms directed towards diplomats of the Great Powers, those of neutral Belgium were not depicted as war-mongers, or in the words of one journalist: ‘Not one of our diplomats thinks, thank God, of troubling the peace of Europe’ (*La Chronique*, November 18, 1910). At the same time, the article in *Le Soir* is rather exceptional in that the social and physical distance between journalists, who hardly ever actually met with diplomats, seems to have impeded them from playing the ‘human interest’ angle by giving their readers a peep into the private lives of the diplomats that they supposedly knew personally.

The fact that they did not, explains why in the mass press these attacks were never directed at individual diplomats but rather at diplomats as a generic type. Although this did not change after the turn of the century, journalists from then on explicitly demanded more respect from Belgian diplomats and claimed for themselves easier access to the world of diplomacy. In their stories about Belgian diplomats, they tried to enforce this claim by recurring to ‘conflict’ frames, constructing an image of diplomats as in many ways the opposite of journalists. In 1905, one journalist argued that, since the press constituted ‘the only mediator between [diplomats] and the great public’, their arrogance towards journalists was incomprehensible (*Le Soir*, March 12, 1905). Another one posited that ‘more than one deserving diplomat’ had sprung from ‘these boys from the people’, as he labelled his colleagues (*Het Laatste Nieuws*, March 12, 1905). Journalists of the mass press were gradually gaining self-confidence in matters of diplomacy. Their conceptions of journalistic duties implied that journalists enter the world of diplomacy as independent actors who closely surveyed the activities of diplomats.

Journalists of mass newspapers knew that diplomats did not read their articles. As Bob added to his ‘nativist' argument cited above, diplomats only knew their own country ‘through reading “their journal”’. ‘Their journal’ actually referred to several ‘quality’ newspapers, all generally five times more expensive than the mass-circulation papers. Journalists of these media set themselves up as the defenders of Belgian diplomats. Framing strategies were similar, as these writers chose to reverse the image created in mass newspapers, stressing the honourability and (economic) effectiveness of the country’s foreign representatives (e.g. *Journal de Bruxelles*, March 6, 1890; *L’Indépendance belge*, August 15, 1895).

Hardly ever confronted with their unflattering representations in the mass media, diplomats never seem to have reacted to them. To be sure, unless the Foreign Minister gave permission, they were forbidden to express themselves in the media as this was deemed incompatible with the

dignity of their profession.[12] Yet diplomats did not refer to their media representation in private correspondence either. Many of them did feel highly uncomfortable with the presence of journalists of the mass press in their professional space. Encountering a correspondent from *Le Soir* at the Algeciras conference in 1906, Count Conrad de Buisseret wrote that 'we avoid journalists like the pest'. He stressed 'the odiousness of this constant promiscuity with journalists, who try to hunt us down and follow us even into our rooms.'[13] Much to the disappointment of diplomats, the distance between them and journalists was steadily decreasing, as Buisseret's choice of words vividly captures.

WikiGermans

After the outbreak of the First World War, the distance became even smaller. Baron Eugène-Napoléon Beyens, like Buisseret, complained in similar wordings about the 'vile promiscuity with journalists, the propagators of all kinds of rumours, even the falsest ones, real venomous flies.' When he wrote these words, the Belgian government was in exile in the French port city of Le Havre and Beyens, who had headed Belgium's top Legation in Berlin before the war, was forced by the King to become Foreign Minister. As such, he had to maintain Belgium's traditional policy of neutrality in European affairs. This meant that he could not pursue a policy of territorial expansion.[14]

The journalists who, in the imagery of Beyens, 'swarmed' around the government, included writers from several mass newspapers, among which *Le Soir*'s main political journalist. They gathered around *Le Vingtième Siècle*, a formerly Catholic newspaper whose editor in chief, Fernand Neuray, had repositioned the medium as a 'firmly national' journal by December 1914. Published in Le Havre, its political influence and circulation figures outranked by far those of the other Belgian newspapers published outside of the occupied country. Its contributors adhered to the recently developed doctrine of Belgian nationalism, which comprised a pronounced distaste for the policy of neutrality. They argued that the government had to ally itself with France and Great Britain in order to obtain what they called 'a Greater Belgium', and which included not only parts of Germany, but also large segments of Dutch territory.[15]

Before the war, journalists of the mass press knew little of the foreign policy inclinations of Belgian diplomats. This changed after German officials published over a hundred letters sent, in the decade before 1914, to Brussels by Belgian heads of legation in London, Paris and Berlin.

German leaders wished to legitimize their army's invasion of Belgium: the correspondence would clearly demonstrate, they estimated, that Belgium had not respected its neutrality. However, no traces were found of secret alliances. What the publishers did find, was 'a crushing pile of charges against the Entente powers.'[16] Pro-German sentiments had indeed loomed large within Belgian diplomatic circles. Conservative monarchists, most Belgian diplomats had been slightly more sympathetic to Imperial Germany than to Republican France, and the German editors took care to highlight indications of such sentiments.[17]

For the duration of the war, *Le Vingtième Siècle* chose not to explicitly accuse Belgian diplomats in this regard, opting instead to suggest that the editors had tampered with the documents. (e.g. *Le Vingtième Siècle*, November 13, 1915) Yet the publication profoundly influenced the way its journalists perceived the country's diplomats. This is most obvious in the press representation of the most visible among them, Baron Beyens, whose neutralist policy supposedly constituted proof of his alleged 'pro-German' attitude. As Foreign Minister, Beyens had formally become a politician, but journalists of *Le Vingtième Siècle* continued to refer to him as a diplomat, thereby combining existing prewar preconceptions of diplomats as a generic type with accusations of the pro-German attitudes recently attributed to Belgian diplomats in particular. Because of government censorship, these charges were subtly formulated. In one of his editorials, Neuray actually attacked the *Kölnische Zeitung* for misrepresenting the intentions and personality of Baron Beyens, arguing that 'obviously, the rag of Cologne wants to make our Foreign Minister pass for a mistrustful and sly miniature Machiavelli who thinks of nothing less than deceiving our Allies and secretly negotiating with the German empire.' (*Le Vingtième Siècle*, March 5, 1916)

Neuray thus confronted his readers with a negative image of Beyens, and casted doubt over his true intentions by appealing to existing prejudice about the untrustworthiness of diplomats. Concluding that 'the country has the right to expect, in the present and in the future, the most precious services' from Beyens, he reinforced this idea. The performative message in the conclusion prefigures how the framing of Beyens (and of other Belgian diplomats) would evolve in case he/they would not execute the foreign policy desired by the annexationists.

As the war proceeded, the press campaign against Beyens indeed intensified and articles about Belgian foreign policy now increasingly focused on his responsibility as head of Belgian diplomacy. (e.g. *Le Vingtième Siècle*, July 12, 1917) With the help of prominent annexationists in the government, Neuray eventually succeeded in having Beyens eliminated.[18]

No longer minister nor diplomat, Beyens started to publish political writings – something that Belgian diplomats very rarely did. Beyens's essays and books were overtly directed towards establishing German war guilt. Remarkably enough, he regularly sent free copies to his archenemy Neuray. 'Forced to inactivity in a moment that I find it very difficult not to be able to serve my country', he explained, 'I have tried to make myself useful to the cause of Belgium and its Allies by writing articles.'[19] Beyens likely wrote these essays not only out of patriotic duty. He also used them to convince readers that he was not the pro-German diplomat that several journalists had made of him. The gift strategy seemed to work, and Beyens no longer suffered personal attacks from *Le Vingtième Siècle*.

Beyens had thus countered the idea of himself as an elitist diplomat who looked down on journalists. He probably knew that he could not fully solve the tension between, on the one hand, the (structurally) democratic nature of the mass media and the ensuing requirements in terms of diplomatic representation, and, on the other hand, the more aristocratic logic underpinning the recruitment and practices of the diplomatic corps. Yet his gifts showed that the almost necessary elitism of diplomats did not have to prevent them from approaching journalists as equals and, at the same time, dealing with media attacks towards them, in a dignified manner. As a result, Neuray started publishing large sections from Beyens's essays, stressing the viewpoints about Belgian foreign policy that they had in common while at the same minimizing their differences of opinion (e.g. *La Nation belge*, January 1, 1918).

Diplomats as Scapegoats

Back in Belgium after the war, however, Neuray created stories in which other diplomats were held responsible for the imminent failure of obtaining a Greater Belgium – in matters of territorial expansion, the Paris Peace Conference proved a great disillusion for Belgian nationalists.[20] In *La Nation belge* (March 25, 1919), the successor of *Le Vingtième Siècle*, Neuray applauded the replacement of Baron Albéric Fallon as head of the Belgian legation in The Hague by a politician, but not without accusing Fallon and his junior colleagues of having failed to persuade the Dutch government to give up the provinces claimed by Belgian nationalists. Only such 'restitution', Neuray argued, would 'repair the injustice which […] has cost Belgium […] streams of blood.' Nationalist journalists were convinced that incorporation of the desired territories would allow the Belgian army to repel inevitable future attacks from Germany, yet often resorted to organic imagery

to make their point. 'If it is [the diplomats'] fault that the wound has grown and become infected,' Neuray advanced, 'the country should know and take the necessary sanctions.' According to him, diplomats ought to be warriors fighting for their country in a conflictual world. Neuray added that Fallon's successor would be perfectly suited for such task. However, Neuray did not wish for this politician to stay in diplomacy, suggesting that success in the Netherlands would pave his way towards national leadership. Neuray felt that politicians were ideal for missions abroad because they stood in close contact with the nation, or to rephrase in the organic terminology he often applied, because the blood of the nation ran through their veins and they breathed the same air. This implied that their missions could only be of a temporary nature. Diplomats, if we would pursue Neuray's argument, had long lost touch with the nation they were supposed to represent.

Leading the slander campaign against Belgian diplomats was not, however, Neuray's *La Nation Belge*, but Edmond Patris, the chief political journalist of *Le Soir*, which quickly regained its dominant pre-war position.[21] In dozens of articles published in the year after the Armistice, Patris and fellow-minded colleagues propagated a discourse in which they combined the pre-war representation of diplomats as an incapable and undemocratic elite, with accusations of a pro-German attitude before and during the war. More explicitly than *La Nation Belge,* they also represented Belgian diplomats as outsiders to the nation.

Patris generally wrapped attacks on individual diplomats in opinion pieces which were seemingly intended to indict the diplomatic corps as a whole.[22] 'Since 1915,' Patris argued in his first elaborate article on the matter, 'our compatriots have been able to read in what the Germans have called the *Belgische Aktenstüken* […] 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.' (*Le Soir*, December 28, 1918) Refusing to consider that the build-up to the war and the tragic event itself had altered the opinions of the country's diplomats, another contributor to *Le Soir* added that to remove this pro-German 'spirit' and to establish 'a national policy', the 'mysterious Foreign Ministry needs to be aired out.' This entailed no longer choosing diplomats on the basis of 'their belonging to a certain "caste".' (*Le Soir*, July 26, 1919)

As the above quotations reveal, despite Beyens's successful charm offensive towards Neuray he still ranked among the main targets of the most important of Belgium's political journalists. When in mid-1919 the diplomat was finally going to receive a new posting, Patris even launched a virulent press campaign to stop this. Beyens was called a Dutch Jew – and because of

his marriage with a German-Jewish woman – even a 'true monument of the natural impudence and exorbitance of the Jewish boches.' (*L'Action Nationale*, July 12, 1919) Having read these lines, Beyens wrote to his spouse: 'We are called Jewish boches. That is ignoble. They want to make believe that I am […] a stranger to the country […] I have remained insensible to Patris's slander, but they attack my old darling and the blow struck.'[23]

In their study about the framing of European politics in the late 1990s, Semetko and Valkenburg argue that 'the predominance of the responsibility frame' in news stories points to 'the importance and potential influence of political culture' on framing strategies of journalists.[24] Taking into account that political culture, aptly defined by Gendzel as 'the structure of meaning through which political participants develop ideas, perceive interests, and acted on both', is historically contingent, these insights equally apply to the mass media representation of Belgian diplomats eighty years earlier.[25] Belgian (and European) political culture in the immediate after-war was permeated both with nationalist sentiments and with the question who was to blame for the succession of tragedies inflicted upon the country up until the disillusion of Versailles. While some newspapers pointed to the rise of chauvinism and to the structure of international politics, journalists with nationalist looking glasses found in the 'incapable' and 'cosmopolitan' diplomats the ideal scapegoats.

Luckily for Beyens and his colleagues, nationalism (and annexationism as its foreign policy expression) quickly became marginalized in both parliament and the press. Belgian voters clearly had no taste for what actually were, in the words of Eric Defoort, the ideas of 'a coterie of schemers teeming around' the government in Le Havre.[26] In 1921, Beyens was finally rehabilitated, becoming the first Belgian ambassador to the Holy See. In Rome, he tried to settle his dispute with *Le Soir*. On the occasion of a visit of the Belgian King, he received a delegation of journalists. Noting that it was led by 'the ineffable Patris, my personal enemy,' Beyens exclaimed: 'What will I not do to satisfy these lordships! I will make sure that they can see the royal cortege from a gallery in the Vatican. But that will not be enough for them, and their demands make me shiver in advance.' Beyens, in the end, also managed to set up an audience for them with the Pope. His efforts resulted in what was actually a friendly encounter with Patris – 'We have talked like old acquaintances,' Beyens found – and an elaborate letter of thanks.[27]

More importantly, the campaign in the mass press against him subsided. The only remaining attack he had to endure, was published in quite a different genre. In a thirty-page article in the

monthly *Le Flambeau* (January 31, 1922), Pierre Nothomb, the ideological leader of Belgian annexationism, attributed the failure of Belgian diplomacy during the war and at the peace conference entirely to Beyens. According to Nothomb, 'this superior man […] did not have any faith in a country that he did not know. Cosmopolitan by birth and career, he would have been a leader among us, had he not been a stranger.'

After obtaining permission from the Foreign Minister, Beyens published a fifty-page explanation of his policy. He had to admit that one passage in Nothomb's article had hurt him: '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 suspect of not passionately loving their country?' (*Le Flambeau*, April 30, 1922)

Harboring a different conception of patriotism, diplomats like Beyens did not accept the antithesis between cosmopolitanism and national belonging, convinced that their transnational networks allowed them to serve King and Country more effectively. Beyens's reference to politicians, who apparently enjoyed more credit with nationalist journalists, could be read as a subtle airing of disagreement with the practice of replacing diplomats with these popularly elected representatives.

Beyens's personal archives also contain a pile of letters congratulating him on his article. In a reply to one of those, Beyens wrote that he did not want to continue the polemic, but added: 'I would have been really stupid not to take the advantage [of] explaining myself in a form which suits me, that of an article in a review.'[28] Beyens's reply sheds light on how diplomats engaged with the logics of different media. They refrained from engaging directly with the mass media, probably out of fear that their message would be distorted, or that it would result in an endless polemic. They felt more comfortable using a slower medium that allowed them to exercise more control over the form of their message.

To be sure, not all Belgian diplomats under fire in the mass media reacted exactly the way Beyens did. Fallon, for one, requested the Foreign Minister to intervene on his behalf, stressing 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.'[29] Another diplomat, labelled "a Germanophile of the worst kind" in *Le Soir* (19 March 1919), even implored a Senator friend to establish a parliamentary fact-finding commission to counter these harsh accusations, only to be dissuaded after another friend convinced him that 'the masses only know what the newspapers print and one

has to reckon with that.'[30] According to this friend, the best thing to do was to "notify Patris about his mistake and engage him to loyally recognize this by publishing a rectification in his newspaper."[31] These examples suggest that, in comparison with the pre-war period, diplomats took a far greater interest in the way they were represented in the mass media.

This not only had to do with the seriousness of the accusations, but also with the awareness that their mediatized personae had a much greater influence on their career perspectives. Personal letters of diplomats contain numerous references to the fear of Foreign Ministers and government leaders to provoke the ire of the mass press.[32] 'In present times, it is impossible to arm oneself against attacks from the press,' the Belgian Foreign Minister admitted to one diplomat, while writing to another that 'public men need to have some equanimity and resign themselves to the sometimes inconsiderate or unjust criticisms of newspapers.'[33] In the case of Fallon, this meant accepting his 'exile' to the Belgian Legation in Bucharest in the knowledge that, before the war, 'stints' in The Hague had often led to the coronation of a diplomat's career as head of the Legation in Paris.[34]

More than before the war, the mass press had caught sight of diplomats, and diplomats had to accept the consequences of this public exposure. Much like John Corner has found in the case of politicians in modern democracies, diplomats were now obliged to work in 'different spheres of political action'. Merely 'performing the self' within the administrative culture of Belgian diplomacy no longer sufficed to successfully pursue their careers. They also had to establish a solid reputation as a 'person of quality' in the 'sphere of the public and the popular', that is the 'mediated complex of settings' in which they were staged as 'public figures'.[35] This required effective management of their relationship with journalists and editors.

A Prestige Has Descended Upon Them

As annexationism vaporized out of mainstream Belgian political culture, this was made easier on Belgian diplomats. By the mid-1920s, they had gained public prestige and received almost exclusively positive media coverage.[36] Journalists still focused many of their stories on both the diplomats' (henceforth commendable) morality and the (henceforth) fruitful consequences of their economic actions. (e.g. *La Libre Belgique*, October 26, 1924; *Het Laatste Nieuws*, June 25, 1924, and November 10, 1935; *La Nation belge*, April 8, 1934) Yet the negative 'attribution of

responsibility' frame, so prominent in the immediate after-war period, seems to have vanished and replaced with narratives that approached diplomats from a human interest angle.

Journalists wrote about their remarkable sporting achievements (e.g. *L'Indépendance belge*, June 28, 1934), and *Le Soir* even praised one young diplomat who had challenged a British colonel to a fist-fight after the latter had insulted King Albert (May 17, 1934). Readers now regularly encountered photographs of Belgian diplomats, often in full regalia and in the company of European leaders, covering part of the front page of their newspaper. Their uniforms and medals conferred them an aura of expertise, prestige and authority which must have greatly appealed to readers in the 1930s. While the titles of the accompanying articles often ran 'Our diplomats' or opposed 'Belgium' or 'Belgian' to a reference to another country, at the bottom of these photos, they mostly saw not much more than the stately names of 'the baron de Cartier de Marchienne', 'the count de Kerchove de Denterghem', or 'the baron de Gaiffier d'Hestroy'. (e.g. *Le Soir*, June 18, December 13 and 25, 1934; and May 18, 1935). Thus a close association between these men and the Belgian nation was created.

After the death of Baron de Gaiffier in 1935, buyers of *La Nation belge* (July 22) could read on the front page of their newspaper a glorification of the diplomat under the subtitle 'Defender of Belgian interests.' The author of the article elaborately stressed that Gaiffier was one of several diplomats – he also named the once reviled but later 'ambassadorized' Fallon – who were 'very Belgian, and certainly not like the cosmopolitans' of the British diplomatic corps. Like his colleagues from *Le Soir*, this journalist 'nationalized' Belgian diplomats: diplomats were henceforth part of the national community. In combination with a large photo of Gaiffier lying on his deathbed wearing his diplomatic uniform, readers of *La Nation belge* were induced to identify with the diplomat their compatriot 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.

The appreciative articles about Belgian diplomats in the 1930s lead us back to Davignon, who wondered why they received so much media attention. He replied that

> Compared to the improvisation that guides domestic politics […], diplomats stand out as specialist phenomena […] 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.

Diplomats apparently stirred the public's imagination as mysterious foreign policy experts who transcended the party-political squabbling in Western parliaments. This sounds plausible: large segments of public opinion in the later interwar years did feel increasingly disillusioned by the 'chatter boxes' of liberal democracy, and urged for a more decisive and authoritative executive power. Diplomats were executors *par excellence*. Part of public opinion might have been guided in this direction by the mass media, many of which lusted after scandals, especially when these involved politicians. [37]

The altered disposition of Belgian diplomats towards the mass media was probably as determining. By the 1930s the most successful amongst them, the aforementioned ambassadors Count de Kerchove de Denterghem and Baron de Cartier de Marchienne, invested considerably in their relations with the mass press. At his eventual departure from Paris, this attitude earned Kerchove the honorary presidency of the association of Belgian journalists in France, and the deep gratitude and great esteem of its members. (*Journal belge de France*, April 17, 1938) Cartier, for his part, explained to a newly instated Foreign Minister how he had managed to produce similar effects in London: 'I do not hesitate to invite my friends of the Belgian press to luncheon in my residence, or to attend a reception in the King's Embassy. There I present them with the opportunity to meet, as by chance, the prominent figures that they wish to meet.'[38] As Cartier was well aware of the nation branding functions of diplomatic buildings, he had lavishly decorated both the Embassy and the Ambassador's Residence, turning both into beacons of Belgium's central place in the history of European high culture.[39] Elegantly treated and provided with access to the political celebrities of their age, journalists surely returned home in admiration for the prestigious manager of all this patriotic pride.

Conclusion

The rise of the mass media in the late nineteenth century and the accelerating interest of its journalists in foreign policy making significantly contributed to what Jorge Heine has labelled the transition 'from club to network diplomacy.'[40] Rephrasing James Pamment's thoughts on the mediatization of diplomacy in the digital era, the presence of new actors from outside of the club

and of communication channels guided by different logics profoundly affected the ability of traditional diplomats to retain their legitimacy and in some cases, their jobs. Especially after the First World War, journalists of the mass media circulated and rearticulated information about them in ways very different from the behind closed doors policy that diplomats were used to. This compelled them to manage and negotiate their mediatized personae.[41] As the Belgian case has shown, assuming a different attitude towards journalists proved crucial in this matter. This does not mean that in the interwar years, many diplomats went along with mass media logics. Notwithstanding their increasing exposure to its norms and codes, they refrained from actively intervening in the mass media to influence the way they were represented. Yet they did open up towards journalists and came to recognize that these writers were legitimate spectators and participants of international politics and their country's diplomacy. In the process, journalists' assessments of diplomats on the one hand, and of politicians on the other, seem to have been as communicating vessels. Before, during, and immediately after the war, journalists set themselves up as the people's voice and used discourse strategies of 'othering' to render diplomats distant, to alienate them 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 the tides seem to have turned, as popular dailies expressed their disapproval of parliamentary politics, and politicians became the ones who did not serve the nation rightly. Diplomats were still 'othered', but in a different way. They were now represented at the same time as part of the nation, and as in some way standing above the nation - as a kind of mysterious, magical mediators. Their reticent attitude and the mystery that, as a consequence, surrounded them, had become a positive quality.

Notes

[1] See Black, *A History of Diplomacy*, 167-169, 176-179, and 181-190 [the quote is on p. 188); Hamilton and Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy*, 141-184.
[2] See most recently Van Waarden, "Demands of a transnational public sphere."
[3] See Alloul and Auwers, "What is (New in) New Diplomatic History", 115-116.
[4] E.g. Pamment, "The Mediatization of Diplomacy"; Brommesson and Ekengren, *The Mediatization of Foreign Policy.*
[5] Coolsaet, *België*, 187-201; Delbecke, *De lange schaduw*.
[6] Auwers, "To become a diplomat", 121-123.
[7] Van den Dungen, *Milieu de presse*, 362-363.

[8] The empirical material is drawn from chapters 5, 7, 9, 11, and the Epilogue of Auwers, *The Island*. In the online archives, I used the terms 'diplomates' and 'diplomaten' to search the four largest Flemish-language newspapers and the six largest French-language newspapers in the years 1890 to 1895, 1900, 1905, 1909 to 1914, 1919, 1924, 1929, 1934, and 1935. This selection covers a wide range of political positions in Belgium and takes into account the newspapers most closely associated with the political (and diplomatic) elite. I have also taken into consideration articles found in the Foreign Ministry's administrative and personnel files, and in diplomats' private papers. For narrative purposes, I have quoted primarily from the party-politically neutral *Le Soir*, at the time the most widely read Belgian newspaper. For the war years, I drew primarily on *Le Vingtième Siècle*, for reasons mentioned in the text.
[9] My understanding and use of framing as a concept and of different possible news frames is primarily based on Entman, "Framing"; and Semetko and Valkenburg, "Framing European Politics."
[10] See Willequet, *Documents*, 37, 44, and 78.
[11] See Semetko and Valkenburg, "Framing European Politics", 95-96.
[12] Léon Arendt to Charles Renoz, May 1910. P. Ext. 1169, Belgian Foreign Ministry Archives (hereafter cited as BFMA).
[13] Conrad de Buisseret to Léon Van der Elst, January 1906. Papiers Van der Elst, 42, National Archives of Belgium (hereafter cited as NAB).
[14] Palo, "The Question of Neutrality."
[15] Defoort, "L'Action française", 115-119.
[16] *Uit de Belgische archieven,* 1.
[17] Coolsaet, *België*, 187-188.
[18] Auwers, *The Island*, 326-352.
[19] Eugène-Napoléon Beyens to Fernand Neuray, s.d. Papiers Beyens, 50, BFMA.
[20] See Marks, *Innocent Abroad*.
[21] De Bens and Raeymaeckers, *De Pers*, 37.
[22] For references to all these articles, see Auwers, *The Island*, Chapter 11 (and especially 518).
[23] Beyens to Marguerite Oppenheim, 13 July 1919. Papiers Beyens, 70, BFMA.
[24] See Semetko and Valkenburg, "Framing European Politics", 103.
[25] Gendzel, "Political Culture."
[26] Defoort, "L'Action française", 147.
[27] *Mon ambassade à Rome*, April 1922, Papiers Beyens, 65, BFMA
[28] Beyens to Léon van der Elst, 13 April 1922. Papiers Van der Elst, 188, NAB.
[29] Albéric Fallon to Paul Hymans, 27 March 1919, P. Ext. 113, BFMA.
[30] Henri Costermans to Van der Elst, April 1919. Papiers Van der Elst, 188, NAB.
[31] Costermans to Hymans, 9 April 1919. Classement B, 72/1, BFMA.
[32] Beyens to Oppenheim, 12 July 1919. Papiers Beyens, 70, BFMA.
[33] Hymans to Fallon, 27 March 1919, P. Ext. 113, BFMA; Hymans to Van der Elst, 15 April 1919, Classement B, 72/1, BFMA.
[34] Auwers, *The Island*, 118-125.
[35] Corner, "Mediated persona", 391-393.
[36] Studying the largest Belgian newspapers every fifth year after 1919, when the media campaign against Belgian diplomats had reached its height – reveals that their journalists produced nearly only neutral and positive articles about the members of the Belgian diplomatic corps.
[37] Girvin, *The Right*, 74-87; Gerard, *De schaduw van het interbellum*, 213-228.
[38] Emile de Cartier de Marchienne to Hubert Pierlot, 11 July 1939. P. Ext 1529, BFMA.
[39] Floré and McAtee, *The Politics of Furniture*; Dauwe, De Geest and Jansen, "Kunst in de Belgische ambassades", 22.
[40] Heine, "From Club to Network Diplomacy."
[41] Pamment, "The Mediatization of Diplomacy", 254-266.

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