On 15 January 1958, Ambram E. Manell, the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) at the United States Information Service in Brussels (USIS Brussels), received a telephone call from the cultural attaché of the Soviet Embassy, Mr. Charov. Through the crackling phone line Charov invited his American colleague for lunch in La Directoire, a restaurant in Brussels. Both men, wanted to get an idea of the plans which the competing cultural service was developing for the World Exhibition of 1958 in Brussels. In Manell’s words: “Charov was fishing because the Soviets want to be certain that the US will not suddenly swamp them with cultural attractions which would rival or overshadow the Soviet effort”. While ordering the most expensive dishes, Charov described the Soviet attractions in the performing arts, which were scheduled for the fair. He also remarked that the US had requested “several million additional dollars” for American performances. He wanted to know what the Americans were planning. Manell limited his response to repeating the text of the press report that had been issued. Nonetheless, he realized that “the Russians are determined to demonstrate their pre-eminence at the exhibition in the cultural field as well as in science [and] that they have a pretty accurate estimate of our program”. 
This lunch between Manel and Charov shows how, during the 1950s, the Cold War evolved into a battle for hearts and minds. The hydrogen bomb had made open war between the superpowers all but unthinkable, channeling the rivalry into symbolic and ideological modes of combat. Hence, President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s foreign policy was shaped by propaganda concerns, which found its most direct expression in public diplomacy. Public diplomacy can be broadly defined as “an international actor’s attempt to conduct its foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics (traditionally government to people).” After 1945 this interaction was primarily organized by governmental institutions, most famously the United States Information Agency (USIA) with its network of local United States Information Services (USIS).

One of those local posts, the USIS Brussels, presents the historian with three pertinent questions. First, the organization of this American diplomatic post is discussed. What were its major concerns and activities? And how was the Belgian geopolitical position evaluated? This first set of questions seeks to place the story of American propaganda towards Belgium in a broader context: the international dimension of Belgian post-war history and the changing nature of American Cold War strategy. It is often overlooked that American diplomats in Belgium were preoccupied with international affairs and devoted little attention to internal Belgian affairs.

The second matter examined is the aim of American public diplomacy. The task of USIS officials in Brussels differed from the goals that were set by public diplomats in other countries. Because Belgium was already pro-American, it becomes difficult to explain what foreign policy objectives propaganda
The United States Information Service in Cold War Belgium

was supposed to advance. While historians have argued that the USIA was created to mobilize foreign public opinion in order to pressure unwilling governments indirectly, the documents of the USIS Brussels tell a different story.

Thirdly, the method that USIS Brussels employed to reach its target population is studied. What was – according to the practitioners – the most effective way to influence the Belgian public? Public diplomats modeled the content and style of their propaganda to achieve as large an impact as possible. By analyzing the exhibitions, film screenings, pamphlets, and other propaganda operations, new light is shed on the technique behind public diplomacy, a topic that is under-theorized in historical research.

In order to answer these three questions the working environment of USIS Brussels and the outlook of its employees are described. The two subsequent case studies address the relationship between soft power and public diplomacy. The campaign in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Korean War is the first story that is told here. It shows how public diplomats freely borrowed from the burgeoning field of public relations theory. In a second example the propaganda projects to promote the European Defense Community (EDC) and European unification are analyzed. This latter account raises important questions about the role that public diplomacy played in the strengthening of the Americanization process. In doing so, this article argues that the concept of soft power does not allow for an accurate description of the wide range of USIA activities.

Historians have devoted little attention to how the Americans tried to influence Belgium after 1945. Instead, they present a conventional account of how economic interests and security concerns shaped Belgian foreign policy. This restricted view

7. Kenneth A. Osgood & Brian C. Etheridge, “Introduction. The New International History Meets The New Cultural History: Public Diplomacy and U.S. Foreign Relations”, in id. (eds.), The United States and Public Diplomacy. New Directions in Cultural and International History. – Diplomatic Studies 5, Leiden/Boston MA, 2010, p. 10. 8. Historians in Belgium have written the history of Belgian foreign policy based on documents of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has created an imprecise understanding of the ways in which the Cold War played out in this small country. It appears as if the country was unaffected by international developments, Americanization, and the Marshall Plan. Belgian politicians only invoked the Cold War to further their own goals. Likewise, the evolution of Communism in Belgium, leftist intellectuals, and the purge of the Belgian Communist Party (KPB/PCB) are presented in separate case studies. In recent years, however, attention is being given to the international network of Belgian Communists. Nonetheless, historical writing about Belgium in the 1950s is mainly limited to the Royal Question and the ideological conflicts about education. At the same time however, the Belgian diplomatic corps – with a focus on internationally proactive ministers such as Paul Henri Spaak and Pierre Harmel – is portrayed as skilled in protecting vital Belgian economic and strategic interests. Others consider Belgium to be an unselfish broker between the great powers. Pieter Lagrou’s excellent contributions with his focus on the American embassy in Belgium, the older and similar work by Jonathan E. Helmreich and Idesbald Goddeeris’s focus on international history are exceptions. See: Marc Lamort, “De Koude Oorlog als storende ruis en ultiem referentiekader 1970-1990”, in Marc Van den Wijngaert & Lieve Beullens (eds.), Oost West Best. België onder de Koude Oorlog 1947-1989,
the limited paper archives that high-level meetings between Belgian and American officials produced. As a small country, Belgium did not occupy an important position in the Americans’ strategic outlook. To understand what made US policy towards Belgium unique, one therefore has to look at what the Americans where doing on the ground where most of the diplomatic action happened and to turn towards a sphere of unconventional diplomacy: propaganda, the capstone of Eisenhower’s Cold War strategy. The story of USIS Brussels does not only introduce the perspective of public diplomacy as a fruitful way to study Belgian-American relations, it also wishes to contribute to the field of Cold War history. While studies have been devoted to what happened on the ground, they rarely focus on small pro-American countries and the tension between high- and low-level policy. This is problematic because the local USIS posts were vital to the development of strategy. The Eisenhower administration encouraged
The US Pavilion at the World Fair in 1958 stood in stark contrast to the Soviet building. Sober and transparent, and without explicitly showcasing the values of the free West, the US Pavilion was one of the main attractions of the Fair (Photos Rudolph Nevi, www.expo58.tk).
every USIS post to develop its own policy. The Jackson Committee – appointed by the President to devise a global propaganda plan – stated that “more effective tactical control of the information and propaganda program of the various United States agencies is needed at the country level”\textsuperscript{11}.

Consequently, the tactics and aims of the local USIS posts require more research. The aim of public diplomacy has been explained by pointing to the House of Foreign Relations Committee which stated in 1964: “The recent increase in influence of the masses (…) has created a new dimension of foreign policy. Through the use of modern instruments and techniques of communications it is possible (…) to influence their attitudes (…) These groups, in turn, are capable of exerting noticeable, even decisive, pressures on their government”\textsuperscript{12}. In short, American public diplomacy had to get popular opinion on the side of the US. In its turn, the people targeted overseas would exert pressure on their own governments to create a favorable atmosphere towards American foreign policy.

Likewise, historians have explained the USIA methods by referring to the “soft power” logic of attraction\textsuperscript{13}. Soft power is the ability of one nation to attract others to its cultural values and consequently come round to its way of thinking, which is separated from “hard power” where others are coerced by offering compensation through bargaining and negotiating or by making threats\textsuperscript{14}. Giles


Scott-Smith explicitly acknowledges that: “While tactics utilizing economic measures were one way to secure objectives, it was not wise for the US to lean too heavily on its hard power (...) It was therefore far more effective for the US to achieve its aims by attracting, nurturing, and co-opting actual and potential allies abroad who would then act according to the same belief system”15.

Despite its wide use, soft power is a highly contested concept. Joseph Nye devised the term in response to a discourse at the end of the eighties that presented the US as a power in decline. He argued that the US still possessed a more potent form of power, namely cultural and ideological attraction, something the US has in abundance, according to Nye. The genealogy of soft power is part of a post-Cold War rationalization of the strategy to project American ideals abroad. Labeling the USIA strategy as soft power thus becomes almost a circular argument, making the link between public diplomacy and soft power problematic16.

The following pages attempt to go beyond this narrative by looking at the practitioners in the field who had to make it up as they went along. Their cultural Cold War was shaped by day-to-day challenges and their work was not limited merely to implementing a blueprint that had been hatched in Washington17. This Belgian lens could only be employed because country plans, country assessment reports, country papers and correspondence – all sent from and to USIS Brussels – have been declassified in the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. In combination with material from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abeline, Kansas, the documents shed a new light on the battle for hearts and minds and tell us something about US policy towards Belgium.
The USIS and the USIA thought about effective ways to reach target audiences. This picture in an IIA brochure displays a strategy for a particular country. The message for each country was shaped by different influences. The USIS and the State Department set out certain goals, while the attitudes of “Country ‘X’” were also taken into account. Finally, the USIS defined “target groups” to whom concrete activities would be directed. These “target groups” would end up receiving a mass of information via different media services.

1. Belgium, the Cold War, and American influence

The discourse that surrounded American public diplomacy in the 1950s, considered USIA activities to be diplomatic tools that were used to deal with countries that were either too strong, and which therefore easily resisted the US, or too weak and which consequently could turn to the Soviet Union, in case they were pressurized too much by the US\(^\text{18}\). However, Belgium was small, stable, and pro-American. The decisions that were taken behind the desk of the USIS center in Brussels were therefore very different.

Fighting the Cold War from a propaganda office: USIS Brussels

The United States Information Service Brussels was one of the 26 posts which had been founded by the Office of War Information (OWI) in 1945 – the propaganda machine at the American home front – to create a favorable image of the liberating American troops. With the dawn of the Cold War, this local office underwent a transformation, especially in 1953 when Eisenhower became president. He “wanted it cranked in at all levels of policy consideration from the National Security Council on down” as Abbott Washburn, deputy director of the USIA, described it\(^\text{19}\).

During his transition in 1952, the president-elect appointed *Time* Life editor Charles Douglas Jackson as his psychological warfare advisor. He became the director of the Committee on International Information Activities – known as the Jackson Committee – which constructed a bureaucracy that would be able to coordinate a global public diplomacy operation effectively. In 1953, Eisenhower created the United States Information Agency (USIA) with a network of United States Information Services (USIS) abroad, in order to replace the State Department’s International Information Administration (IIA). As a result, the USIA took over the task of disseminating publications, setting up exhibitions and libraries, and showing films overseas. Only exchange programs were still run by the State Department\(^\text{20}\).

As public diplomacy gained more weight, the projection of American ideas abroad was justified in new ways. Yet, Belgium was a fairly
unproblematic ally and did not fit the typology of countries on the list where USIS posts were needed. In strong and assertive countries, like France, public diplomacy was used to influence the people because pressuring the government was difficult. In weak countries, like West Germany or Italy, public diplomacy was used as a way to work around the “tyranny of the weak”. Vulnerable nations which were rebuilding their societies and were confronted with rampant poverty and proximity to the Communist bloc, could not be pressurized too much, because this would cause a defection towards the Soviet side or alternatively a surge of hostile nationalism. Belgium was neither strong nor weak. While it could mobilize some resistance, for instance against the EDC, the American ambassadors to Belgium, Robert Daniel Murphy and Myron Melvin Cowen, knew that the government would not be able to ignore direct American demands. Cowen was convinced that a conversation with Paul Van Zeeland, the Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1949 and 1954 could push him into deciding on ratification.

Despite the calm and pro-American climate in Belgium, the US decided to maintain an office in Brussels. The public affairs officer (PAO) was the head of the post and determined the local propaganda policy together with the information officer, the press secretary, the cultural officer, and the assistant cultural officer during meetings from which the local Belgian personnel were excluded. Belgium was also the information and cultural officer after 1953. Belgians were hired to do jobs such as library work, driving the mobile film unit, or setting up exhibits. By the end of 1954, 26 people were employed by USIS Brussels.

Initially the USIS personnel were located on the ground floor of the American Embassy while the information center could be found in a separate building that was alternately used as a concert hall, movie theatre, exhibition space, and conference room. The Lincoln Library was also housed in this facility. By 1955 there were 69 of these...
centers on European soil and in June 1950 the information center in Brussels changed its address from Voorlopig Bewindstraat/Rue de Gouvernement Provisoire 3 to Waterloolaan/ Boulevard de Waterloo 18.\textsuperscript{25}

The people at the USIS Brussels looked with envious eyes towards the activities that were organized in neighboring countries. In May 1951, the Belgian country team complained: “While it is realized that the Belgian operation can never hope to achieve either staff or funds comparable to those in more critical areas, it is felt strongly that present allocations are definitely too little.”\textsuperscript{26} These grievances were also made in a more subtle way. Alice Rogers Hager, the first PAO, mentioned an alleged quote by Congressman Fred E. Busbey who was “impressed and [felt] that we should have more money.”\textsuperscript{27}

The available reports to Congress, however, show that Belgium was in a fairly good position. Between 1951 and 1954, Congress approved respectively $75,650, $117,233, $122,500 and $155,300 for Brussels. Within the group of countries that were small, strategic, and relatively pro-American – namely the Netherlands, Iceland, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – Belgium moved to the top of the ranking in the first half of the 1950s. In 1951 and 1952, Sweden received more. In 1953 it was third after the Netherlands and Denmark and in 1954 Belgium received the highest grant. Nonetheless, from the middle of the 1950s onwards, the financial situation deteriorated because the focus of USIA shifted to the Third World. Mobile film units were no longer repaired and the USIS feared financial strangulation. The personnel pleaded that they should at least maintain the library: “The value of the library is, in fact, so great, that this post decided, during the most recent retrenchment, that it must stay open, if USIS Brussels were to remain in business at all.”\textsuperscript{28}

The USIS was only given a marginal role in the organization of the biggest public diplomacy display window of the 1950s, the World Fair of 1958 in Brussels. After the Congo crisis in 1960, USIS Brussels had to remove the feeling that the US had not supported Belgium, a view held by 80 per cent of the Belgian population a survey noted.\textsuperscript{29} The Americans saw Belgium as a country that was stable and, by and large, pro-American. Why then was the entire operation described above developed?

# Tab 1: Grants (in American Dollar) allotted to the Usis Offices in Western Europe by the State Department (1951-1954)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRIES</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1953</th>
<th>1954</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>$75,650</td>
<td>$117,233</td>
<td>$122,500</td>
<td>$155,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>$53,818</td>
<td>$71,710</td>
<td>$151,390</td>
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<td>Iceland</td>
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<td>$23,590</td>
<td>$42,000</td>
<td>$50,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>$13,230</td>
<td>$16,700</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$11,328,782</td>
<td>$8,854,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$1,486</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$3,239,185</td>
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</tr>
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<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$1,085,014</td>
<td>$1,810,700</td>
<td>$1,884,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
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<td>$57,620</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
<td>$91,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>$57,585</td>
<td>$133,700</td>
<td>$124,340</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
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<td>$83,365</td>
<td>$70,900</td>
<td>$120,200</td>
</tr>
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<td>$76,300</td>
<td>$98,025</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>$50,098</td>
<td>$27,000</td>
<td>$40,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>$71,272</td>
<td>$114,126</td>
<td>$176,690</td>
<td>$240,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>$201,471</td>
<td>$249,857</td>
<td>$422,433</td>
<td>$431,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Belgium in the American Strategic Outlook

When Theodore Francis, a Democratic senator visited USIS Brussels in 1951 he asked a similar question: What was the strategic weight of a little country like Belgium in American Cold War policy? Belgium was low on the priority list; the correspondence with the White House was limited to the exchanges of holiday greetings and the arrangement of state visits. On the 11 May 1959, King Baudouin – “an excessively shy and timid youth”, in the eyes of Secretary of State Christian Herter – visited the US and met with President Eisenhower.

The American psychological strategists in Brussels on the other hand, saw Belgium as strategically vulnerable, because of its small size, its key position between Germany, France, and England, a lack of natural barriers, and its high population density. It could easily be run over by the Soviet enemy. The Congo was crucial because of its uranium mines in Sinkolobwe. Despite the fact that strategists had the USSR in mind, USIS Brussels did not fear Communism in Belgium at the beginning of the 1950s. What’s more, it wanted to awake some vigilance. The State Department

agreed: “Today Communist forces are on the defensive in Belgium, but there is no reason to assume that they will remain inactive. Complacency on our part at this stage would be inexcusable.”

This watchfulness has been seen as a sign of Cold War paranoia. After all, the Belgian Communist Party had only been successful in the elections of 1946 because of the role they had played in the Resistance and their loyalty to Moscow made their popularity decline further. After having been part of the Van Acker and Huysmans governments they were ousted on 12 March 1947.

However, the documents suggest that anti-communist measures and confidence about the weakness of Communism could coexist. The ideological opponent did not create enough turmoil, the public diplomats reasoned, to make it easy for them to justify American military aid and Belgian participation in NATO. After a speech in 1950 by the American Ambassador, Robert Daniel Murphy, a rapport to Washington was pleased that “the Communist press is at last attacking him [the ambassador] and also leveling attacks at ECA [Economic Cooperation Administration] and embassy officials. Previously, there had almost never been any mention of either the embassy or individual officers, with the exception of minor ones leveled at ECA.”

Even with the dawn of the Korean War in June 1950, when the fear emerged that Communists would infiltrate “the key sectors: transportation, communication, government offices”, there was no anti-communist propaganda operation set up. This did not prevent USIS Brussels from becoming a flourishing enterprise. Eight new staffers and a new propaganda officer for the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) had to be hired to deal with the workload. More importantly, public diplomats also seemed to make progress in the attainment of their goals. Belgian newspapers like De Standaard and the Social Democratic Volksgazet and Vooruit wrote polemical pieces about the Communist

allegations and protested when Soviet citizens won the Queen Elisabeth competition\textsuperscript{35}. International problems, such as Korea and Communism were thus central in the eyes of public diplomats in Brussels, but when a national crisis like the Royal Question erupted, the Americans in Belgium remained surprisingly silent. The Royal Question began in 1940 when King Leopold III had refused to join his government in London after the Belgian capitulation. When the country was liberated, the German occupation force deported Leopold to Switzerland where American soldiers discovered him in a castle near Strobl in Austria on 7 May 1945. The referendum, which was held to decide on the return of the King, was won by those who favored his return. Subsequent riots in the Walloon region however, forced Leopold to cede the throne to his son, Baudouin\textsuperscript{36}.

Admittedly the American ambassador to Belgium had sent some alarming messages to Washington about rumors of a Leopold-inspired coup. However, embassies tend to overstate the importance of certain developments in their host country. This became clear when someone other than Ambassador Charles Sawyer, namely the chargé d’affaires Jefferson Patterson, reported in October 1945: “It is possible that the remark [of a coup] may be interpreted not so much as a statement of probability as one motivated by a desire to produce a sympathetic attitude (...) towards the Van Acker government”\textsuperscript{37}.

The USIS country team for its part described the riots that surrounded the referendum as an exciting turn of events: “Then began a fantastic ten days in Belgian history”. While there had been “extreme incidents”, on the whole the attention paid to the Royal Question in the public sphere meant that “valuable time has been lost” for more important issues, namely Belgium’s “international obligations (...) in the Korean situation”\textsuperscript{38}. For USIS strategists in Belgium, the Korean War was a pivotal moment in their operation, which had begun with their efforts in 1950 to anchor Belgium more tightly within NATO.

A young king Baudouin – quoted as being “exclusively shy and timid” – is welcomed on his arrival in Washington by President Eisenhower on 11 May 1959, at the start of his visit to the USA [Brussels, Archief van het Koninklijk Paleis, Photo Album ‘Reis van koning Boudewijn naar de VS (1959)’, unknown photographer].
II. NATO, the Korean War, and “hard power” public diplomacy (1950-1952)

Despite Belgium’s reputation as a small and trustworthy ally, in the early 1950s the USIS had to work hard to transform words of support into deeds. Initially the Belgian Foreign Affairs Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, advocated a ‘third way’, aligning Belgium with neither the American nor Soviet camps. In 1948 he realized that a small country like Belgium would only be able to defend its interests in international affairs if it was embedded within Europe and the Trans-Atlantic Alliance. Consequently, Spaak supported NATO and the Marshall plan. In doing so he reversed the logic that had guided Belgian foreign policy up until 1945. Instead of focusing on neutrality and independence, Spaak established a policy of European Atlanticism. Belgium was now loyal to the US but demonstrated opposition when that was in line with other European states. To head off this challenge, the USIS opted for hard power propaganda in which American security was presented as a bargaining tool.

NATO as a bargain (1949-June 1950)

Spaak’s ideological volte-face was marked by his “Nous avons peur” speech of 28 September 1948 to the General Assembly of the United Nations. In the aftermath of the Coup de Prague, the Treaty of Brussels, which had united European nations in common defense, was being transformed into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Because of the “increase in tensions in the Cold War”, Alice Rogers Hager intensified the public diplomacy operation in Belgium in 1950. By that time, however, Belgium had already become a solid member of the “Free World”. Tom Braden, head of the CIA, even counted Spaak among his friends. What role then did public diplomacy play?

What worried public diplomacy officers was the skepticism with which American promises to defend Western Europe were greeted. The basis of popular support for the decision to join NATO had to be widened, a choice that the government had already made. Hager welcomed this policy because “continuing instances of defeatism over lack of Western European security have been seen in a number of editorials”. To take away Belgian defeatism about the chances of survival in case of war, a clear message was being sent: “The United States is prepared to help defend – not merely ‘liberate’ – Western Europe in the event of war”.

What was important about the strengthening of European defense was its propaganda value. Paul Nitze, who succeeded Kennan as...
director of the Policy Planning Staff and the principal author of NSC-68 – the crucial Cold War document of the Truman administration – advocated military build-up not because he feared an imminent clash with the USSR, but because the psychological impact of a preponderant and monolithic military bloc would increase the Americans’ ability to act\textsuperscript{43}. American officials in Belgium displayed a similar way of thinking. A contingency plan – “Operation Canal” – was drawn up because Belgium was seen as vulnerable. In the case of an invasion American citizens would be evacuated through the harbors of Zeebrugge and Terneuzen to the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, the head of that embassy, Admiral Kirk admitted to Spaak that: “It was rather fantastic to think of Russian paratroopers landing there but after all we had had Pearl Harbor”\textsuperscript{44}. Military measures were in the first place meant to create support for the pro-American decisions of the Belgian government\textsuperscript{45}.

To reach this goal, rather than the soft power logic of attraction, the hard power tactic of offering the Atlantic Alliance as a win-win bargain was deployed. Propaganda emphasized security gains in exchange for compliance with NATO obligations. The Mutual Defense Aid Program (MDAP) was emphasized in every possible way in the activities that the USIS organized. This program was initiated in 1948 and financed weapon deliveries and military training. The USIS considered the promotion of these efforts to be an effective way to influence Belgian attitudes in the matter of European defense\textsuperscript{46}.

The USIS officials vigorously kept the press up to date by organizing so-called press seminars, where MDAP officials explained the philosophy behind the program and emphasized American efforts. The ambassador gave interviews and the USIS transported 60 journalists to the harbor of Zeebrugge to report about the first weapon delivery to Belgium on 12 May 1950. Plans were made to send journalists to Germany who would report on the training of Belgian soldiers by Americans.

The emphasis on American help also found expression in the 1250 copies of Document de la Quinzaine that were furnished to USIS Brussels by the USIA. Its first issue was dedicated to the mutual defense program and in high demand, according to the USIS\textsuperscript{47}.

Another propaganda resource that offered the reward of protection in exchange for a benevolent Belgian attitude towards
NATO, was found in the commemoration of the Second World War at the cemetery of Neuville-en-Condroz. Weeks of preparation and long meetings between officers of the United States European Command and the American embassy went into this ceremony. The speeches were translated into German, French, and Dutch and Hager attended the ceremony, which was broadcast live on Flemish radio, indicating the high value that the USIS attached to this message of American defense. Implicitly the ceremony signaled that the US would not hesitate to act again in the event of an attack. The Communist Drapeau Rouge reacted by running an editorial that attacked the ambassador by naming him the “New Gauleiter of Belgium”. The Belgian public however “came in considerable numbers (even though it was a working day), many walking to the cemetery from miles away, carrying their bouquets of field flowers”. Gratitude for the Liberation and a hostility to renewed war were the fastest route to Belgian hearts and minds. The propaganda of Hager and her team was full of war and weapons. USIS Belgium chose to offer NATO as a straightforward deal: in exchange for unconditional support, the Belgians were offered security.

This hard power technique was unique, especially when we compare it with the approach of the NATO Information Service (NATIS). NATIS had been founded in August 1950 under the chairmanship of the Canadian, Theodore F.M. Newton, in order to instill a sense of Atlantic Community into the population. This was the fulfillment of Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty which wanted to bring “about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded”. Tours for journalists at NATO headquarters, fellowships, Oxford summer schools, attempts to establish Atlantic chairs, and travelling exhibitions were all aimed at attracting people to a sense of community. This approach differed in fundamental ways from what was done in Brussels, where people were asked to accept NATO to get its benefits in return, a message that was repeated when the Korean War started.

Belgian volunteers during the Korean War in April 1951 are struggling with the terrain itself, somewhere near the Imjin-river. Although one of the smallest units under the UNO umbrella, the Belgian battalion would – together with the Luxembourg unit – hold its ground and force a retreat of more numerous Chinese forces. For this feat, Lieutenant-Colonel Vivario would later receive a medal from the American General James Van Fleet (Photo's CEGES/SOMA, nos. 6348 and 6336).
Propaganda in a shooting war and persistent hard power

On 25 June 1950 – the day North Korea invaded the South – a new period in the battle of the USIS started. Truman and the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, called a meeting of the UN Security Council to condemn the invasion and to push for the formation of a UN expeditionary force on 4 July 1950. It was difficult to find countries that were willing to participate, in part because Truman expected the European allies to carry a bigger part of the financial burden. In line with this new policy, USIS Brussels now asked Belgium to become a more active member of the Western alliance, “a vital core of stability and leadership in Western Europe” with “international obligations to fulfill.” Nonetheless, the USIS’s overall methods and goals were maintained.

The USIS country team wanted to achieve both moral and financial goals. First of all, the population had to support the Belgian government, which under American pressure had sent a battalion of volunteers in 1951. In Prime Minister Joseph Pholien, the Americans had found an ally who was willing to raise the defense budget, uphold military service, and take anti-Communist measures. After the murder on the leader of the Communist party, Julien Lahaut, on 18 August 1950, Pholien purged the Belgian civil service of an estimated 600 fellow-travelers.

Although Van Zeeland had adopted the American view of the conflict in which the 38th parallel was not legally binding, he was still not willing to send troops. When Belgium only sent aircraft carriers, the US stepped up its diplomatic pressure in June 1950. In the end however, a first battalion of 600 men left Antwerp on 20 December 1950. The Belgian “Brown Beret” battalion under Colonel Crahay joined the British in the pocket of Pusan where they pushed back the North Koreans. 3500 Belgian volunteers fought in Korea and 106 fell in action.

For the USIS the financial goal was crucial. The Belgians had to be convinced to accept their government’s increased military expenditure. In this small country, as was reported to Washington in December 1951, “the sensitive nerve is that of the pocketbook”. In the eyes of the Americans, Belgian approval of NATO, the UN, and the Korean War did not automatically translate into sufficient willingness to finance these initiatives. In light of hostile Belgian attitudes towards conscription, making the

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assigned period shorter with every election cycle, this American concern was understandable\textsuperscript{54}.

This financial goal surpassed any other concern, even the fear of Communism and open war that bubbled to the surface in the first weeks of the Korean War. This paranoia inadvertently took root in the minds of USIS officials because they analyzed public opinion on a day-by-day basis\textsuperscript{55}. While USIS reports only six days before the invasion had not even mentioned Communist threats, suddenly Communist infiltrators made an appearance\textsuperscript{56}. Before the Korean War there had only been “crypto-Communists”, interested in Marxism. It was a way to assert a national identity that was rooted in an appreciation for high culture as opposed to the popular culture of Americanization. In the words of USIS Brussels: “The Communist ‘line’ is frequently parroted (…) due to fuzzy thinking, some of it to an overly ‘intellectual’ approach to liberalism (…) the pride of an old, highly cultural people, stubbornly resistant to the inroads of the young ‘barbarian from the West’ appears in curious ways\textsuperscript{57}.

However, after the outbreak of hostilities, Communist propaganda had “influence to a certain extent”. It was “to be found in the ease with which misunderstanding of American motives filters up to top circles”\textsuperscript{58}. Little problems that hampered USIS operations were now seen through a Cold War lens. Belgian national radio had not broadcast a message from the ambassador because the quality of the recording was insufficient, which proved that the radio had become infested with Communists. However, the expansion of Belgian popular support for the government’s Korea policy remained the top priority. The PAO and his team did not develop a propaganda policy against the ideological

adversary, which was atypical for the Truman period when propaganda was hard-hitting and virulently anti-Communist.

To remove the anxiety that was created by taxpayers’ money flowing to a new war, the tactic of attraction was added to the hard power method. Accordingly, visitors to the activities that were organized by USIS were told that the US bore the biggest burden and that it was only fair to ask for a small contribution in return. After all, the gain of collective defense far outweighed the cost, which was a hard power communication strategy wary of any attraction. Exhibitions about the training of Belgian soldiers and the MDAP weapons conveyed the message that “the Mutual Defense Assistance Program is active and ‘mutual’ and is sending a great many Belgians to the United States for training”\(^{59}\). The photo panels that displayed the American training of Belgian soldiers and weapon deliveries, emphasized how much effort the US was putting into Belgium’s defense. It was, the argument went, only logical to ask for a small contribution in return.

The Belgian population was told that even after the planned increase of the Belgian defense budget, the effort would still pale in significance compared to the colossal American financial investment. The American ambassador, Robert Murphy, repeated this message in front of an audience of Flemish entrepreneurs: “the Belgian defense appropriations were but 5 per cent of the total national product of Belgium (...) Belgium was lagging behind her NATO partners, who were devoting up to 15 per cent (19% in the case of the US)\(^{60}\). In private, Murphy also complained to Pholien. In reality the US never reached this percentage, but the propaganda value of such statistics is evident\(^{60}\).

Additionally, people had to be captivated by the ideals that the US linked to their involvement in Korea, the first attempt by USIS Brussels to explore the attractive potential of soft power. In that way Belgians would be willing to support the Americans in Korea, not because doing so would ensure their own safety but for the sake of ideals that needed to be defended. Three ideals were attached to this war in order to appeal to the sense of honor that would attract people to the Americans’ foreign policy goals. Besides justice and humane warfare a new ideal, namely collective security, was ushered in.

The Korean War was sold as a just war. USIS Brussels spent countless nights writing press reports that detailed why the Korean War was necessary. According to the USIS the new films Dwight D. Eisenhower, In Defense of Peace and Why Korea? touched the right chord. The film on Eisenhower shows the career of the general and his triumphant tour through Europe and the United States after the war. In Defense of Peace puts together news images of the Korean War, the American role

in World War II, the Marshall Plan speech, and the departure of the Soviet Union from the UN assembly. This linear storyline had to suggest that Soviet behavior had made conflict inevitable. Nonetheless, the US had in the past fought for equally noble causes and would not hesitate to do it again. Why Korea? was a Hollywood production by Edmund Reek that took an unambiguous stance: the Second World War could have been avoided if the US had reacted earlier. The fighting in Korea was meant to avert such a scenario of dishonorable appeasement.

Korea was not only a just war but also a humane war. The USIS propaganda described how the US respected the life of every citizen. Newspaper publishers were asked to react against the photos that the Drapeau Rouge had published, allegedly showing American mass murder. The Christian Democratic De Standaard and the Social Democratic papers, Vooruit and Volksgazet, were the least cooperative in the eyes of USIS. Exhibition displays indicated that “concern is being given for the welfare of Korean civilians, particularly children”. Photographs of children playing, field hospitals and food and medicine drops, props of first-aid kits and packages with parachutes were used to provide material evidence to support this story.

A third propaganda topic was found in the creation of a new ideal: “collective security”. Exhibitions showed that: “The action in Korea is a United Nations action”. USIS Brussels wanted to write a pamphlet together with USIS London, not on the American capability to defend the West, but about the values that underpinned NATO and the MDAP. Belgian radio stations received tapes with the testimonies of Belgian volunteers. By letting them speak, values such as courage and self-sacrifice were connected with the fight.

The story of the former Belgian defense minister, Henri Moreau de Melen, who became a volunteer in Korea was even transmitted around the world by the Voice of America. This radio station had been established during World War II and broadcast extensively to areas behind the Iron Curtain, only “112 hours a week to [Western] European countries”. Listeners heard: “I believe we cannot leave [the] responsibility of sustained UN action in Korea to American troops alone. (...) Now that I am free, I believe it is my duty to volunteer”. The message suggests that a

Despite all the hardships of war, the American army made sure to provide the Belgian volunteers some time for relaxation by engaging local dancers and musicians (Photo’s CEGES/SOMA, nos. 15245 and 15246).
bigger financial effort was equally courageous and served a fundamental UN principle. This radio work also aimed to counter the success of Radio Moscow. US Senator Henry Cabot Lodge had been informed by an anonymous Belgian observer: “‘Radio Moscow’ is so well done and does great harm in the villages (…), they can feel the effect of this radio. They have heard people say ‘After all, will the Russian be so bad?”67.

Despite this strategic refinement, soft power was only partially introduced because the Korean War changed the basic aim of propaganda in American foreign policy. According to historians, war in Korea strengthened the conviction that the battle for hearts and minds had become an independent and crucial battle ground in the Cold War. It coincided with Truman’s launch of the “Campaign of Truth” a few days earlier and it opened up a new propaganda front in Asia68. Therefore the US “attempted to gain some sort of propaganda initiative over the USSR”69. Furthermore, the confrontation with prisoners of war who wanted to stay in Communist North Korea and the popularization of the notion of brainwashing made practitioners think about the power and psychological depth of propaganda methods. Edward Hunter’s book on brainwashing became an instant success among policymakers70.

However, by narrowing the task of USIS Brussels to guaranteeing the financial means for the armed conflict, public diplomats in Brussels allowed themselves to become a handmaiden to the more important shooting war. They did not fight their own symbolic battle. Instead of heading to the call of NSC-68 to intensify “the field of (…) political and psychological warfare”, the activities of Hager actually meant a step back for the symbolic struggle. The previous role propaganda had played during World War II – namely as a tool

to gather popular support for the war – was restored.\textsuperscript{71}

It shows that the country team in Belgium selectively adopted the new techniques from the burgeoning field of communication science. The most influential theorist was Edward Bernays, who argued in \textit{Propaganda} (1928) that public opinion was best influenced in an indirect way through popular media rather than through hard-sell tactics.\textsuperscript{72} Even though USIS officials decided to introduce more attractive tactics to make their target population support the government’s decisions, the need to support the war effort diminished the status of public diplomacy as an independent area of Cold War struggle. Only with the debates about the EDC did USIS Brussels definitely switch to more imaginative and attractive tactics to reach the full potential of their operation.

\section*{III. EDC, European integration, and learning the soft power way (1952-1958)}

At the Korean front, peace talks began on 9 July 1951 and the frontline stabilized in 1952. As a consequence, the agenda of USIS Brussels became determined by political rather than by military challenges, such as the promotion of the EDC and European integration. The USIS showed more understanding towards the decision to reduce the time recruits had to serve in the Belgian army. “There appears to be no reason,” a report noted, “why Belgium should take on greater obligations in this regard than its allies”.\textsuperscript{73} This new climate provided the incentive for the full-fledged use of soft power.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{The soft power of a military alliance: the EDC}

On 28 October 1950 the French Prime Minister René Pleven presented his plan for the establishment of an EDC, led by nine European commissioners. The Korean War had made the Americans realize that Adenaur’s request to militarize West Germany and a shift of a part of the defense expenditures to the Europeans was necessary. However, when Acheson explored this idea with the Europeans at the Waldorf Hotel in New York, he met with a lot of resistance. To break the deadlock, the French suggested the creation of a European Army because it would put a check on German military power. The then NATO commander Eisenhower convinced the

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Truman administration in June 1951 to push
for its creation75.

Paul van Zeeland told the American
ambassador that Belgium supported the
EDC project, but rejected the proposal of a
European Minister of Defense. The Benelux
states opposed the plan because they believed
that in a supranational defense structure
small countries would be silenced. Belgian
resilience in defending its independence
became a real threat to the realization of the
project. After it was hinted that American
aid would be halted if the country kept on
refusing, Belgium capitulated and signed the
treaty on 27 May 195276.

The public diplomacy machine only started
turning after the signature was in place.
Ratification of the EDC by the Benelux states
was important in order to convince France to
do the same. Therefore, when Van Zeeland
met Eisenhower during the afternoon of 16
March 1953, the Secretary of State, John Foster
Dulles, recommended that the President
“question him firmly regarding just what he
plans to do to secure rapid Belgian ratification
of the European Defense Community
Treaty”. He believed that “playing upon
Mr. Van Zeeland’s vanity” would make him
take the initiative. In the end the agreement
was rejected by a coalition of Gaullists and
Communists on 30 August 1954 who, after
Stalin’s death and the Korean Armistice in
1953, considered German rearmament to be
less urgent77.

The EDC propaganda in support of the treaty
is fascinating because it is a prime example of
how the preferences of the target population
made the public diplomacy approach evolve
from hard to soft power. The EDC project
was understood in a very specific way by
USIS officials who wanted to convey their
understanding to the Belgian population.
Previous encounters with Belgian society had,
however, taught the USIS office that a low-
profile operation focused on attraction would
reap the most success. Despite American
efforts to unite Western Europe, the USIS did
not explicitly encourage the European idea
until 1953. Plans to encourage integration had
always been mentioned within the context of
military cooperation: “We have endeavored
to insure Belgium’s active participation in the
programs of NATO, EDC, the Schuman Plan,
and other efforts towards European Unity78.

This ambivalent transition from the EDC
as a purely defense initiative to a broader
community that exemplified an idea of
cooperation to which people might be
attracted is illustrated in the pamphlet, The
European Coal and Steel Community (The
Schuman Plan). This pamphlet was produced
in December 1952 under the auspices of
the Mutual Security Agency and thus had
a military goal. Nonetheless the ideal of

75. Idem, p. 176, 450. 76. Geir Lundestad, “Empire” by Integration. The United States and
buitenlandse politiek..., p. 395-397. 77. Memorandum for the President, Dulles to Eisenhower,
Subject: Call of Belgian Foreign Minister Van Zeeland at 3:00, March 16, 13.3.1953, AWF,
Papers as President 1953-1961, International Series, Box 3, f: Belgium (6), DDEL; Rik Coolsaet,
511.55-511.552, f: 2, NARA.
cooperation was emphasized. It showed a map of the participating countries under a magnifying glass with the slogan “Within the framework of North Atlantic Cooperation...six nations of Western Europe are moving toward economic and political unity”. The EDC was positioned on the next page in a series of calendar pages depicting the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (April 1948), NATO (April 1949), the Council of Europe (May 1949), the European Payments Union (July 1950), and the European Coal and Steel Community. After it, there was an undated calendar sheet for the European Political Community. The pamphlet told the story of how the removal of “one of the historic causes of conflict” and the “strengthening of the coal and steel industries will contribute greatly toward Western Europe’s ability to sustain an adequate defense effort.”

The EDC was understood to be more than a mere defense project. It was also important for what it implied: through defense communities the existence of one common enemy was emphasized. The US made efforts to keep the peace; the USSR stood on the sidelines: “Defense, Unification of Europe, international cooperation with such things as the Schuman Plan, [and] Benelux, prove that the objective is peace.” The so-called feature packet – an envelope filled with propaganda material that was sent to the posts – which contained the Schuman Plan pamphlet bore the very appropriate title, Working for Peace. The EDC was depicted not only as a part of the European integration process but also as a military project. What was discovered, however, was that if this message was to be attractive, it had to be shaped by the expectations of Belgian society. The USIS worried about the fact that the EDC could be seen as an imperial tool in the hands of the Americans. The new PAO, Rex Miller who had joined the Information Service on 4 August 1952, warned against an image that resembled that of the Soviet Union: “It has been, of course, desirable that these programs [EDC, NATO, the Schuman plan] should be identified as European and not American.”

USIS officials attempted to reconcile their own understanding of the EDC with the expectations of Belgian society in order to be successful. How could the EDC and more European responsibility be promoted without the US being accused of neo-colonialism? The answer was found in the promotion of values that were deemed universal and not particularly American. Belgian attention was focused on the so-called “high ideals” that were embodied in the goal of establishing the EDC.

In this way Belgians would unknowingly strive towards ideals that were in line with American convictions. The EDC was never explicitly mentioned. Instead three puzzle pieces – American support, the European military contribution, and European integration – were

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joined together into one general message. The receivers of this message were required to put the puzzle together themselves to see the intended underlying image: the EDC as an idealistic voluntary cooperation to resist aggression. USIS employees distributed pamphlets and organized exhibitions about the idealism and bravery that had accompanied military cooperation in the past. For instance, an exhibition that depicted NATO and the MDAP implicitly referred to the EDC where collective security and cooperation with the US were crucial as well. Collective security was depicted as an unselfish act in films such as *Alliance for Peace* which explained that the Atlantic organization was a peaceful organization of political cooperation and showed that the NATO treaty was signed to guarantee peace.\(^82\)

In contrast to the beginning of the 1950s the values of cooperation were on display, not a subtext to the call to support the American military effort. In this way, characteristics of the EDC could be propagated without mentioning the project itself. This move towards universal values suggests that the strategy was more and more built on intuitive attraction. If public opinion could be seduced into supporting the ideals, than the public would automatically support projects that defended and incorporated those principles, such as the EDC.\(^83\)

The emphasis on the morally uplifting principle of collective security was embodied in the 1952 film *Belgian Troops in Korea*. This film demonstrated how important the EDC was for USIS Brussels because it was the first time that the Belgians were the topic of an internationally distributed propaganda narrative. Normally European propaganda material was adapted to fit the Belgian situation. What is more, USIS collaborated with the Belgian army. They were allowed to amend the storyboard to ensure that the Belgian role was made as big as possible.\(^84\)

Above all, the movie was a prototype of soft power attraction: ideals were essential to the story and hard power in the form of rewards or pressure was absent. The opening of *Belgian Troops in Korea* shows Belgian soldiers crossing a bridge in the glow of explosions. A voice-over hints at the moral ideal that is being communicated: “Each of these Belgians is a volunteer who has offered to fight far from his native land for a principle. The principle is ‘collective security’...a basic tenet of the United Nations”. The film attempts to cast collective security in moral terms: security is not a bargaining chip. During a

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medal ceremony at the end of the film, the American general James van Fleet states: “By your contribution, the goal of worldwide collective security has been brought this much closer”. This sentence also contains the second message, being that of the Belgian contribution. The use of Belgian guns and the intellect of the Belgian soldiers was emphasized: “There’s only one trouble [sic]: they learn too fast. They finished a three-day lesson in one day!”

The film attempted to incite a feeling of respect among its viewers for a country that sends its brightest soldiers to accomplish a great idealistic goal. In that way the USIS reproduced an image that had been fabricated during the previous World Wars of Belgium as a small country that was dragged into a war against its will because of the arrogant behavior of an aggressor. Old notions were salvaged to facilitate identification by the viewer with the subject and to attribute historical meaning to the idea of “collective security”.

Eventually the Belgian parliament would ratify the treaty on 26 November 1953 with 148 votes in favor and 49 against. Despite some resistance by those Christian Democrats fearful of domination by the Bonn–Paris axis and the left who saw the EDC as an American foreign policy tool, the American ambassador to Belgium had always been convinced that ratification would not be a problem. What was problematic was Van Zeeland’s hesitant leadership. The only task of USIS Brussels was making sure that the Belgian population supported its government. After all, Prime Minister Jean Van Houtte had already written to Eisenhower in January 1953: “[Belgium’s] ideas completely coincide with yours with respect to this policy for strengthening the peace, security, and prosperity of associated states. It is with this purpose in mind that the Belgian government has decided to give full support to the establishment of the European Defense community.” Eisenhower underlined Van Houtte’s idealistic motivations, indirectly approving the USIS’s new strategy of instilling the Belgians with idealism.

Hiding the American hand: influencing the blueprint for European integration

The hidden American hand to attract the Belgian population would become vital in the USIS’s last big project of the 1950s: European integration. The launch of the Schuman Plan on 9 May 1950 was a first step in the direction of a European Coal and Steel Community. While historians disagree about the extent to which American influence shaped European integration, on the whole the Americans stimulated integration in three ways. First, by setting unification as a prerequisite for Marshall aid; second, by emphasizing that European integration was a way to

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reconstruct Germany and contain it; third, the preponderant US power created a climate in which ideas of unification could flourish, because the US would act as a deterrent to German aggression. In the words of the historian Geir Lundestad: “With the kind of pre-eminent position the United States had in several European countries, including the crucial nation of Germany (…), it is difficult to believe that European integration could actually have taken place without American backing”88.

American propaganda also had a role to play. In 1954 John L. Brown became the cultural attaché and alternately exercised the mandate of PAO with Abram E. Manell. Brown was a charismatic figure who had connections with all layers of Belgian society. In 1942 he joined the OWI, he became a press officer for the Marshall Plan in Paris and, when posted in Mexico, a colleague threatened to punch him on the nose. His academic view on cultural diplomacy – he published Panorama de la littérature américaine – was not always welcomed by others in the USIA, making him a kind of a legend. However John Clifford Folger, the American ambassador, praised him: “He fully lives up to everything I had heard and is truly an outstanding individual with amazing energy”89.

From 1954 onwards this energy was focused on deploying and expanding the role of public diplomacy in support of the European project. Again, the USIS waited until it was absolutely certain that the Belgian diplomatic corps had fully embraced the American vision of an Atlantic Europe. Up until 1954 Belgium had been run by a government who took a skeptical position towards European integration. In 1953 the USIS acknowledged that “[the] Benelux [state] must be heavily depended upon for support of key American objectives, a recognition of the ability of these small countries to undermine the integration process”90.

In May and June 1955 Belgium changed its position. The Benelux states produced a white paper for the other members of the European Coal and Steel Community, who were due to meet at the Messina Conference in June. Having always favored the idea of economic integration, and having experienced the advantages of a Benelux customs union and

the failure of political integration with the EDC, Belgium, with Spaak as newly appointed foreign minister, enthusiastically pleaded for the creation of a European common market with a supranational authority. When in opposition, Spaak had presented himself as the champion of European integration within an Atlantic framework. It is this political course that the USIS wanted to support. The group behind the PAO believed that their actions would have a broad European impact, because of the growing number of international organizations that had brought their headquarters to Brussels.

The tactic of hidden attraction, which had been developed during the EDC years, was expanded. Belgium was now used to attract the European population to European integration. A USIS official explains: “Country objective I might be phrased more accurately as follows: ‘further utilization of Belgian leadership in all phases of European integration’.” To reach this goal pro-European organizations within Belgium were supported. The Information Service used Belgium to communicate American opinions to the rest of Europe. American demands were pushed further into the background through this tactic, because Europeans were asked to support Belgium’s policy of European unification, not American plans. This strategy was also meant to give the European allies the feeling that they were managing their own affairs, an approach that gained more prominence because of the failure of the EDC project. At the same time Washington was redesigning its global strategy, because “the blatancy of such propaganda contributes to the rise of anti-American attitudes and sentiments”, a report by the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) – Truman’s psychological warfare meeting – noted in 1954.

Pro-European organizations took center stage and the USIS offered hidden support because support for the ideals of these groups meant a furthering of American policy. The invisible US influence and the untainted motives of a harmless small nation only served to increase the appeal. Trips to the US and exchanges were offered, for instance to Jean Drapier, the secretary-general of the European movement. Drapier was a European federalist who had been the chief of Spaak’s Foreign Affairs Ministry in

Anti-communist propaganda poster depicting the northern-Korean leader Kim Il-Sung as a poisonous snake (psywarrior.com).
1948. He led the Belgian delegation at the Conference of the Hague which was held from 7 until 11 May 1948. Organized by the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity, the Congress brought together representatives from across a broad political spectrum to discuss European political cooperation. Drapier was keen on excluding the Eastern European countries from a federal Europe because they were not genuine democracies: “Again we ask to exclude from the definition of democratic peoples or democratic regimes those who do not guarantee the freedom of press nor the free movement of all intellectual and artistic works”. This must have pleased the information officers. It made Drapier the ideal missionary for a US-approved “Federal Europe”.

The USIS also maintained close contact with other organizations such as the European College in Bruges which had been founded in 1950 and the rather peripheral Conference on a European Intellectual and Spiritual Community. The origins of the College date back to the same Congress where Drapier had played an important role. Salvador de Madariaga, a Spanish statesman, thinker and writer-in-exile had proposed its establishment. American intervention aimed to mold these utopian ideas into a form that would fit with American plans. The European federalist movement had probably captured USIS’s attention when they actively lobbied to make the EDC design as federal as possible.

Other propaganda softly whispered the message of European unity. Abstract ideals surpassed the underlying message up to the point that it became almost impossible to notice the link with European unity or to discern American backing. A seminar invited Dutch, Belgian, and Luxembourg teachers to discuss how an atmosphere of European intellectual unity could be created. They talked about teaching methods from the participating countries and the US. The so-called “Franklin Year” in 1956 – organized to commemorate the 250th birthday of Benjamin Franklin – was seized upon to emphasize the intellectual unity of Europe and its connection with the US, through the theme of Franklin’s cosmopolitan mindset. Lectures on “Franklin et l’Europe” were given by the cultural affairs officer throughout Belgium, Luxembourg, France, and Holland. In Luxembourg the PAO travelled to the local Rotary Club to give a speech on “Franklin : Citoyen de Philadelphie et Citoyen du Monde”, combined with the screening of the Encyclopedia Britannica film on the life of Franklin.

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94. Original language citation: “Nous demandons encore que soit exclu de la notion des peuples démocratiques et des régimes démocratiques celui qui n’assure pas la liberté de la presse ni la libre circulation de toutes les œuvres de la pensée et de l’art” [Jean Drapier, Intervention de Jean Drapier au congrès de l’Europe, La Haye, 8.5.1948, Centre de recherche et de documentation dédié aux études européennes (http://www.cvce.eu/viewer/-/content/4c99b419-7642-408d-953c-c2c1918bc40a/fr; jsessionid=D8A368BF73FB795729D404F8B289B)].
97. Memorandum, USIS Brussels to USIA, Franklin Ceremony at Rotary Club of Bruges, 23.3.1956, RG. 306, UD-WW 344, FRC 99, NARA.
The Pamphlet *Franklin, Citizen of the World* tells Franklin’s life story, how he stayed up late to read books, how he travelled to London, his mission to raise men’s awareness of civic affairs, his improvement of the postal system, his founding of the University of Pennsylvania, his invention of the lightning rod, and his role in drafting the American Constitution: “But (...) Franklin never lost sight of his basic goals – to contribute in every way possible to the exchange of ideas and knowledge among people. Only through communication, he believed, could real freedom be preserved and universal peace attained”. His *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, a yearly publication about everyday life, “created a common cultural bond among the 13 separate colonies*. The booklet emphasized the benefits that come from cooperation in the realm of culture and politics through Franklin who was “honored throughout the world” for his “great role in advancing man’s freedom”. With its many pictures and narrative quality it was aimed at a wide audience that was interested in an easy, unchallenging read99.

For a more intellectual public, round-table discussions were organized in the USIS library. These were discussions among leading authors or social figures. The organization of fruitful European cooperation “furthered the idea of integration on the intellectual plane”99. In practice, the integration idea was limited to organizing conferences attended by people from different European countries and putting intellectuals on the lecture program who integrated global cultural influences, but especially American ones, in their own work. On 20 February 1956 Jacques Huisman, the director of the National Theatre of Belgium who admired American theatre, spoke in the Lincoln Library of USIS Brussels about his staging of the plays *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller in Belgian theatres100.

The fact that public diplomats wanted to get popular opinion on their side by all means possible is at odds with a political economy interpretation of Americanization where the US is seen as the dominant player in the market for material culture after 1945. It is argued that a certain influence was inevitable despite the ability of receivers to adapt American culture to their own taste101. Volker Berghahn and others have claimed that public diplomacy must be seen as a strengthening of the Americanization process. The US wanted to manage cultural exchange. However, while the

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sparkle of the American dream is essential to Americanization – so appealing and qualitatively superior that it could not be resisted – the USIS posts often covered up American involvement. Not only in Belgium did propaganda practitioners adjust their message to heighten appeal: “Helen Kirkpatrick the head of Mission France’s information division for most of the Marshall Plan years, sought to remove the US label from much of its output (...) these officials concluded that the most effective US program was the least visible one”\(^{102}\).

Very explicit messages about Europe were only being spread in the margins. Movies about European unity and nineteen exhibit windows in twelve Belgian cities filled with photos of Schuman and European maps, served to keep the theme vibrant. Additionally, the European theme was also exploited to receive more money from a mutual fund that had been created to stimulate European unity. The organizers of a library conference clearly tried to receive funds by presenting their project as a European venture. In a dispatch to the USIA, the officer lamented that “the financial burden of this project is too heavy for a post with a budget as limited as that of USIS, Brussels. However, its European character would justify, we believe, appropriations from funds allocated for projects promoting European integration”\(^{103}\).

In short, the EDC was a military partnership, but the Americans took an approach that differed fundamentally from the way in which military issues were addressed at the beginning of the 1950s. They learned that the expectations of the population were crucial to the production of effective propaganda. Collective security was no longer presented as a bargain. At the end of the decade, collective security had become a value used to attract Belgians because support for the ideal would most likely mean support for the EDC initiative that carried this ideal forward.

IV. Conclusion: USIS-Brussels’ public diplomacy in reverse

To summarize, the operation of American public diplomats in Belgium was unique in three ways. First, the impression of Belgium that USIS officers held was rooted in the international Cold War which created concerns about strategic vulnerability, the

Korean War, the EDC, and European integration. However, the USIS’s assessment of Belgian Communism was not distorted; it was considered to be weak. If anti-Communism was not the main driver behind the USIS presence in Belgium, what then was the *raison d’être* of a propaganda post in a small country that could easily be pressured?

The answer to this question can be found in the basic aim of USIS Brussels: instead of working via the people to get a stubborn foreign government to cooperate, the Belgian government was pressured directly – using Nye’s terminology, hard power – and only afterwards was popular support sought through public diplomacy. Furthermore, the propaganda technique applied by local posts were not born out of a widely employed strategy of attraction. Everyday encounters with the Belgian public taught USIS officials, in a rather ad hoc way, that attraction – using Nye’s terminology, soft power – was the most effective way to wage a battle for hearts and minds.

The work of the American PAO in Brussels shows that public diplomacy cannot be equated with soft power. A strategy based upon the belief that people could be manipulated or attracted to follow American policy did not pre-date the growing importance of public diplomacy. It was the outcome of a gradual learning process triggered by the challenges of the Cold War. Day-to-day experience with Belgian society created insights into Belgian norms to which USIS officials then adjusted their methods.

These three conclusions have two important implications for the way in which we see soft power logic operate within American public diplomacy and Americanization. First, American soft power could only exist when the US conformed to the norms that existed within the international system. Public diplomacy in Belgium was constrained by structural power, a form of power that stems from the shared values and norms which are part of social structures. In Nye’s theory of soft power, however, structural forms of power are taken together with relational forms of power where an actor exercises power within a relationship by changing the values of others. Nye’s confusion stems from the fact that he has not taken the outside world into account. Public diplomacy has to be seen as a two-way process not a one-way imposition.\(^\text{104}\)

A second implication is that the activities at USIS Brussels are at odds with Nye’s argument that soft power is a unique resource at the disposition of the United States. Power can only exist within a social relationship and is not a resource that can be accumulated or possessed by one country. The Americans actively tried to hide the American character and emphasized the universality of values such as democracy and freedom of speech.\(^\text{105}\) Consequently, public diplomacy cannot be seen as a facilitator of the penetration of American culture.

In short, the USIS Brussels did not work through the population to reach a stubborn government, but made sure the
The United States Information Service in Cold War Belgium

people supported a pro-American decision which the Belgian government had already taken under American pressure. Public diplomats did not see soft power attraction as the widely accepted premise for propaganda, but only gradually used the power behind ideals and culture to hide the American hand. They reflected in creative ways the transformational mechanism behind propaganda. Historians should follow suit and take off the soft power lens.

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Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AmEmbBru</td>
<td>American Embassy Brussels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWF</td>
<td>Ann Whitman File</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDEL</td>
<td>Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (Abilene, Kansas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>European Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>Economic Cooperation Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDC</td>
<td>European Defense Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRC</td>
<td>as in FRC carton, Federal Records Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIA</td>
<td>International Information Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPB/PCB</td>
<td>Kommunistisch Partij van België / Parti Communiste de Belgique (Belgian Communist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDAP</td>
<td>Mutual Defense Assistance Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARA</td>
<td>National Archives and Records Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATIS</td>
<td>Nato Information Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSC-68</td>
<td>National Security Council (Paper) - 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OWI</td>
<td>Office of War Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAO</td>
<td>Public Affairs Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>RG</td>
<td>Record Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Dept</td>
<td>State Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UD-WW</td>
<td>a code for the finding aid in the archives. It doesn’t stand for anything. It indicates that the file is undescribed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>USIA</td>
<td>United States Information Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>USIE</td>
<td>United States Information and Exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USIE-ECA</td>
<td>United States Information and Exchange-European Cooperation Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USIS</td>
<td>United States Information Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USIS Brussels</td>
<td>United States Information Service in Brussels</td>
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</tbody>
</table>