

DANGEROUS OPPORTUNITIES

*Reassessing Belgian Neutrality during the Crimean War
(1853-1856)*

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This article will draw on extensive source material, some of which has never been used before, to make an assessment of Belgian neutrality at the time of the Crimean War. It will sketch the evolution of neutrality during the conflict and the different opinions harboured on the subject by the main protagonists : the king and crown prince, the Foreign Office and its diplomats. It will also propose that Belgian neutrality was indeed violated, not least in the minds of members of the royal family and the diplomatic corps, but also and perhaps most importantly, economically. To that end, this contribution will use Belgian arms exports as a concrete angle to analyse Belgian neutrality.

In recent years the Crimean War has received a renewed interest in academic writing. Some studies have attracted international attention, others have passed almost unnoticed¹. Over the years the Crimean War, and its place in the broader context of the so-called Eastern Question (*Question d'Orient*), have been abundantly and thoroughly covered in the historiography. This permits us to omit a basic factual narrative and explanation of events where they do not contribute to a better understanding of actual attitudes or interventions. Nevertheless, it remains useful to explain the reason for the war's outbreak, which was to prevent the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire. In this, the Crimean War was similar to a number of wars in which the Ottoman Empire had been involved since the end of the 18th century.

At stake was, first, the maintenance of the empire's territorial integrity and increasingly also the status of non-Muslims, over which there was bitter rivalry between France and Russia. Napoleon III demanded that Sultan Abdülmeçid (1823-61) present the keys of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to the Catholic patriarch. The sultan accepted, thus angering the Tsar who represented the interests of the Orthodox Christians. On 28 February 1853 Nicolas I sent the extraordinary envoy Prince Menshikov to Constantinople to demand a religious pro-

tectorate for all Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire under the patronage of Russia. On 13 May 1853 an ultimatum to force Turkey into a Russian-Turkish treaty of alliance was presented. On 24 May 1853 Napoleon III proposed a Franco-British entente against Russia. Britain hesitated, but its ambassador in Constantinople, Stratford Canning, encouraged Turkey not to acquiesce to the Russian demands. After the Ottoman refusal, Russian troops occupied the Danube principalities (Moldavia & Walachia) in July 1853. On Turkish request the French and British fleets anchored near Constantinople. A Russian provocation, the destruction of the Ottoman fleet at Sinope in November 1853, caused the French and British fleet to sail into the Black Sea at the end of 1853. On 29 January 1854 Napoleon III demanded that the Tsar withdraw his troops from the Danube principalities. When Russia refused, Britain and France declared war on 28 March 1854.

I. Belgian neutrality

After the Belgian Revolution, Belgium received imposed neutrality by virtue of the 20 January 1831 protocol of the London Conference guaranteed by the five Great Powers. Britain, France, Austria, Prussia and Russia all guaranteed the integrity and inviolability of the Belgian kingdom. Under the principle

1. A selection of some of the more recent studies : WINFRIED BAUMGART, *The Crimean War, 1853-1856*, London, 1999; TREVOR ROYLE, *The Great Crimean War, 1854-1856*, London, 1999; PHILIP WARNER, *The Crimean War. A Reappraisal*, Ware, 2001; CLIVE PONTING, *The Crimean War. The Truth Behind the Myth*, London, 2004; IAN FLETCHER & NATALIA ISHCHENKO, *The Crimean War : A Clash of Empires*, Staplehurst, 2004. One of the more eye-catching was Orlando Figes' *Crimea. The Last Crusade* (London, 2010). For the Ottoman role see CANDAN BADEM, *The Ottomans and the Crimean War, 1853-1856*, Leiden, 2010.

of reciprocity, Belgium was to take a neutral position towards all the states, excluding any particular sympathies for one of them. Thus, Belgian neutrality could become a stabilising factor in the European power balance. In fact, Belgium took the place of the former buffer state, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. The five powers agreed not to invade or attack Belgium without the consent of the others². Initially, the protocol was rejected by the Belgian National Congress on 1 February 1831. During the debates the Congress held on the so-called XVIII Articles from 1 July onwards, neutrality became a discussion point. Some congressmen feared the powers would have the right to intervene in commercial matters; to others imposed neutrality seemed in conflict with article 65 of the Constitution³. Advocates in their turn believed neutrality to be a blessing because Belgium received the right to mobilise an army. A consensus existed only over the fact that neutrality excluded waging wars of conquest. On 9 July 1831 the National Congress finally accepted the XVIII Articles making Belgian independence a fact. After King William I rejected them and following the disastrous Ten Days' Campaign, new talks started in London on 3 September 1831. These resulted in a new compromise, the so-called XXIV Articles, which were clearly more negative for Belgium. Article 7 forced Belgium to remain neutral but without the explicit guarantee of the earlier XVIII Articles⁴. The treaty was signed in London

on 15 November; yet, Russia refused to open diplomatic relations and Holland was also weary of signing the new treaty. It took years before this delicate international problem was solved with the peace treaty between Belgium and Holland of 19 April 1839. Belgium finally became a full member of the European state system and its imposed neutrality came fully into force. The European powers committed themselves to guarantee the neutrality and territorial inviolability of Belgium, but they intentionally adopted a vague guarantee.

There was confusion over whether the guarantee was joint and collective or joint and several (implying the individual responsibility of the powers). The treaty also did not state what the guarantors were bound to do in order to protect Belgian neutrality. In part this was because they did not want to be bound to act under all future circumstances. Decisions on the future enforcement of the guarantee would have to be reached when the need arose, and the great powers certainly did not foresee the debate over the nature of the obligations the guarantee imposed. Given the lack of precision as to the nature of the guarantee, interpretations of the obligations imposed varied during the years of Belgian neutrality until 1914. Although Belgium held to its neutral status, there were exceptions including Leopold's actions in 1840 and, as will be further developed, the posture taken during the Crimean War⁵.

2. RIK COOLSAET, *België en zijn buitenlandse politiek, 1830-2000*, Leuven, 2001 (3rd revised edition), p. 38. 3. ÉMILE HUYTENS, *Discussions du Congrès National de Belgique, 1830-1831*, Bruxelles, 1844, vol. III, p. 415, 464-465 and p. 389. 4. RIK COOLSAET, *België...*, p. 43. 5. For Leopold's diplomacy in 1840, see JAN ANCKAER, *Small power diplomacy and commerce. Belgium and the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Leopold I, 1831-1865*, Istanbul, 2013 (chapter 3) and ALFRED DE RIDDER, "Léopold I, Metternich et la Question d'Orient en 1840", in *Revue Catholique des Idées et des Faits*, 10, 17-24 and 31.8.1928.



This regional map shows the main military deployments with land- and naval battles during the Crimean War between 1853-56. (www.juancole.com)

Belgian neutrality and its significance for the European equilibrium have not been treated abundantly but nevertheless satisfactorily in the historiography. Emile Banning⁶ was the first to identify the different views on Belgian neutrality, usually exposed in reactions to an international conflict – the Turco-Egyptian War of 1840, the revolutions of 1848, the Crimean War, the Risorgimento, the American Civil War, the recruitment for Mexico, the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian War and so on⁷. Banning argued that neutrality was becoming the essential basis of Belgium's public law and policy and that the authorities would need to devote great care to determine the principles and practices which that status would require in wartime. William Lingelbach followed Banning in contributing to the interpretation of the vague formulation of Belgian neutrality in the original treaties⁸. Much later, in the 1970s and 1980s, Horst Lademacher and Daniel Thomas further developed the idea of Belgian neutrality as a mainstay of the European equilibrium. The latter studies

remain fundamental contributions to the debate on the nature and evolution of Belgian neutrality before World War I and also for the period under scrutiny here⁹.

Belgium's position and neutral status during the Crimean War has never been fully and thoroughly examined. Decades ago, former director-general of the Foreign Office archives, Alfred De Ridder, summarised Belgian neutrality during the war as well as the consequences for French-Belgian relations of the Duke of Brabant's marriage to an Austrian princess¹⁰. It is fifty years since Jean Lorette analysed the possibilities of a Belgian engagement in the Crimean War; however only certain aspects were addressed, especially recruitment on Belgian soil and Belgium's position after Sardinia's entry into the coalition¹¹. In the 1950s the Italian historian Vittorio Emanuele Giuntella briefly examined Belgium's position after Piedmont had joined the allies¹². In Rik Coolsaet's general study of Belgian foreign relations

6. ÉMILE THEODORE JOSEPH HUBERT BANNING (1836–98) was a doctor of philosophy and literature, a senior civil servant who played an important role in Belgian politics in the 19th century. Banning started his career as a journalist with *L'Écho du Parlement*, after a stay at the Royal Library, as archivist and librarian. He was appointed to the department of Foreign Affairs and became a leading actor in matters of domestic as well as international policy, as well as a confidant of Leopold II. Banning was a leading negotiator at the time of the negotiations on the status of the Congo in Berlin in 1884 and Brussels in 1890, see MARCEL WALRAET, "Émile Banning", in *Biographie Coloniale Belge*, t. I, 1948, col. 48-86. 7. See ÉMILE BANNING, *Les origines et les phases de la neutralité belge*, Bruxelles, 1927 (the text had remained unpublished, before its publication by Alfred De Ridder in 1927). 8. WILLIAM E. LINGELBACH, "Belgian Neutrality : Its Origin and Interpretation", in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 39, N° 1, 10.1933, p. 48-72. 9. HORST LADEMACHER, *Die belgische Neutralität als Problem der Europäischen Politik, 1830-1914*, Bonn, 1971 and DANIEL H. THOMAS, *The guarantee of Belgian independence and neutrality in European diplomacy, 1830s-1930s*, Kingston, 1983. 10. ALFRED DE RIDDER, "La neutralité belge pendant la guerre de Crimée", in *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire moderne*, 5th Series, Nr. 13, 5.1926, p. 264-265 & *Le mariage du roi Léopold II d'après des documents inédits*, Bruxelles, 1925. 11. JEAN LORETTE, "Problèmes de politique étrangère sous Léopold Ier. À propos d'éventuelles participations belges à la guerre de Crimée (1854-1856)", in *L'expansion belge sous Léopold Ier (1831-1865)*, Bruxelles, 1965, p. 567-593. 12. VITTORIO EMMANUELE GIUNTELLA, "L'intervento piemontese in Crimea e la neutralità del Belgio", in *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, XXXIV-4, 1952, p. 657-676.

since 1830, the Crimean War received only scant attention¹³. In contrast, in Gita Deneckere's recent biography of Leopold I there is a substantial part on the king's personal diplomacy before and during the crisis¹⁴. From Deneckere's portrait of Leopold, it appears the king was the champion of Belgium's defence of its neutrality. The daring projects for territorial expansion envisaged by the king's eldest son, Leopold, Duke of Brabant, were dismissed by Deneckere as "crazy", but there was more to it than meets the eye. By far the most useful and extensive contribution to the study of Belgium's position during the Crimean War has been Daniel Thomas' general work on neutrality. Thomas discussed the official position of absolute neutrality, the booming Belgian arms exports, France's ambiguous attempts to engage Belgium in the coalition, the possible Belgian participation after Piedmont-Sardinia's entry and the allied unease with Russian exiles in Brussels. Thomas, however, did not deal with the expansionist ideas of the Duke of Brabant, nor was his attention on Belgian arms exporting comprehensive. Generally speaking, the significance of this last area in the neutrality discussion has been neglected. Historians tended to faithfully accept previous statements on the quality and quantity of the arms exports and on the absence of the allies' pressure on Belgium in the matter.

Because in the end Belgium held on to its neutrality without being dragged into the war directly or by proxy, some historians have

seen this as the end of the matter. Of course, small power diplomacy has less significance than that of the great powers, but Belgium could justify some special attention as, industrially, in the middle of the 19th century it was anything but a small power¹⁵. Because of Belgium's strategic position, the importance of its neutrality was enhanced over that of other neutral powers of the time like Sweden or Portugal. Furthermore, as Jonathan Helmreich has demonstrated, a small and militarily weak state can survive and even flourish through diplomacy¹⁶. From a close reading of the sources and the use of extensive, previously neglected source material (*Akten zur Geschichte des Krimkriegs*, diplomatic correspondence, etc.), it will appear the situation was more tense and complex than historians have assumed. Researchers of 19th century Belgian foreign policy should take care not to overlook the foreign sources, especially when studying periods of major crisis. De Ridder and Lorette's unanimous conclusion that Belgium was never pressured to leave its neutrality seems, in part, to be the result of a failure to consider foreign sources in their research.

II. Prior to the declaration of war (pre-28 March 1854)

The Crimean War was the first large-scale European war since Belgium's creation; a war in which the powers who guaranteed Belgian neutrality were implicated. The

13. RIK COOLSAET, *België...*: less than two pages but they are an excellent synthesis. 14. GITA DENECKERE, *Leopold I. De eerste koning van Europa*, Antwerpen, 2011, p. 500-537. 15. DAVID OWEN KIEFT, *Belgium's Return to Neutrality. An Essay in the Frustrations of Small Power Diplomacy*, Oxford, 1972, p. viii. 16. JONATHAN HELMREICH, *Belgium and Europe. A Study in Small Power Diplomacy*, The Hague, 1976.



A postcard showing nineteenth-century Constantinople, the nerve centre of diplomatic activities before and during the Crimean War.

outbreak came in a period of tense relations with neighbouring France. During the two decades following the Belgian Revolution, growing French influence had caused friction culminating in the accession of Napoleon III as Emperor on 2 December 1852. The new Emperor's expansionist ambitions caused Leopold to fear for his kingdom as Napoleon considered splitting up the buffer state between Holland and France. A return to France's 'natural borders' established before 1815 seemed imminent. In March 1853, the French minister in Brussels, His de Butenval¹⁷, informed de Brouckère¹⁸ that if France's voice in the Orient was ignored, it would take revenge elsewhere. France would demand satisfaction on the Rhine for any injustice suffered on the Bosphorus. According to the Belgian resident in Constantinople, Edouard Blondeel (1809-72), only if France's ambitions were satisfied in the Orient would the safety of Belgium be guaranteed¹⁹. Though Foreign Minister de Brouckère agreed, for the

government this was no reason to modify its attitude towards neutrality, which excluded involvement in political problems between other states²⁰.

De Butenval's statement added to the existing disquiet in Belgium. To pre-empt a breach of neutrality by France, a mixed parliamentary commission was constituted which proposed to fortify the borders and increase the size of the armed forces from 80,000 to 100,000. The cost for the whole army was estimated at a 32 million Frs. a year. As a gesture the king reduced the crown prince's personal allocation to 200,000 Frs. De Brouckère defended the proposals in parliament as necessary for Belgium's political existence²¹. Leopold unconditionally supported the cabinet's military plans, but was furious about parliament's procrastination as it insisted on the establishment of a commission whose recommendations it decided to neglect. In a letter to the Prince of Chimay²², the King wrote

17. Baron Charles Adrien His de Butenval (1809-83) started his career as secretary at the Lisbon legation. In 1841 he became *chargé d'affaires* in Constantinople, plenipotentiary minister in Brazil in 1847 and later in Sardinia from 1851. In 1852 he took charge of the French legation in Brussels. On 23 June 1853 he was nominated at the *Conseil d'État*. 18. Henri Ghislain Joseph Marie de Brouckère (1801-91) was, amongst other occupations, governor of Antwerp province (1840-44), extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister in Rome (1849-52), liberal delegate (1831-49, 1856-70) and later government leader and Foreign Minister (1852-55). 19. "...c'est le cas ou la France obtiendrait en Orient des concessions suffisantes à son ambition et son désir d'agrandissement. Alors l'Angleterre et l'Allemagne sentiraient plus que jamais le besoin de défendre la Belgique comme état frontière et d'ailleurs la France elle-même satisfaite, porterait son énergie et son attention vers l'Orient ce qui serait une garantie de plus pour nous", see AFO, PC-T, Blondeel to de Brouckère, 13.5.1853. For Blondeel, see JAN ANCKAER, "Blondeel van Cuelebroeck (Edouard)", see http://www.kaowarsom.be/en/notices_blondeel_van_cuelebroeck_edouard. 20. AFO, PC-T, de Brouckère to Blondeel, 28.5.1853. Blondeel was explicitly asked not to diverge from the official government line. 21. PPCD, 4 May 1853, p. 1260: "Ce que le pays désire avant tout, c'est qu'on prenne des mesures efficaces pour assurer son existence politique. Il s'inquiète, et il a raison, du chiffre des dépenses; mais il se préoccupe bien plus encore de l'indépendance nationale, de l'honneur national". 22. Joseph de Riquet, Prince of Chimay (1808-56) was an extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister in The Hague (1839-41), Frankfurt (1842-43), Rome (1846-47) and Paris (1854). He was a Catholic delegate (1843-56), governor of Luxembourg province (1841-42) and counsellor (1846), alderman (1848) and mayor (1849-66, 1872-76) of Chimay.

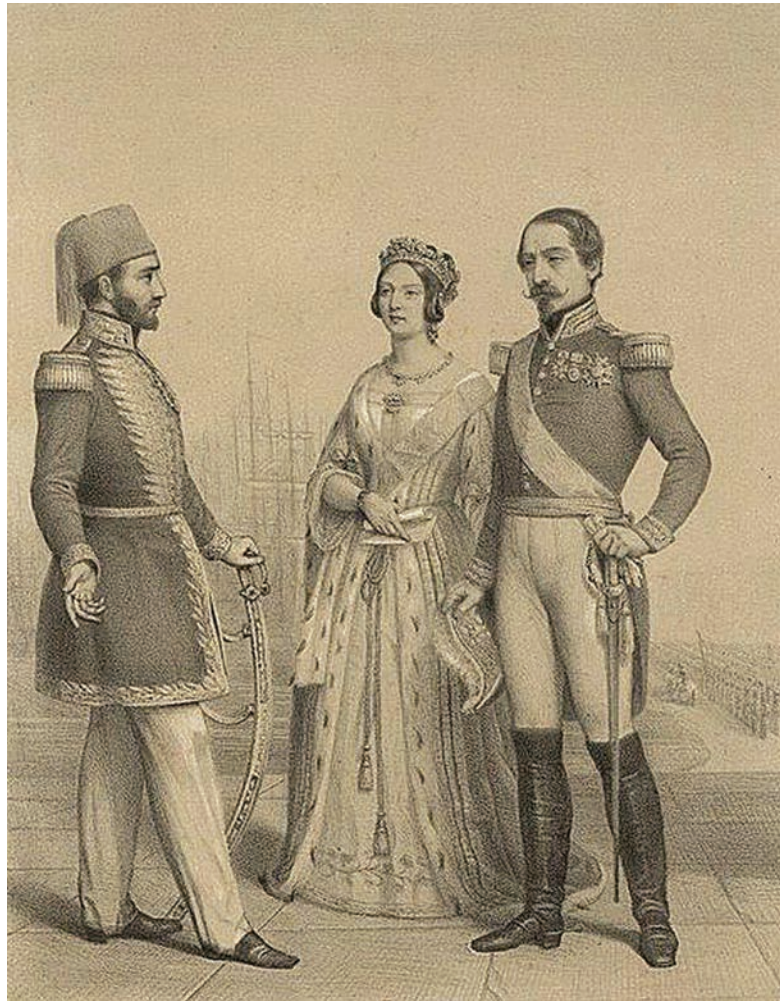
no-one respected parliamentary privileges more, but when the country's existence was threatened, the latter became a mere fiction²³. Eventually, the delegates approved the proposals by 71 against 21, but only after the king further pressured several members of the opposition²⁴.

Belgium would arm itself and this raised questions. The Prussian envoy in Brussels, von Brockhausen²⁵, demanded an explanation from Leopold. The King confirmed Belgium's neutrality, but also his determination to take further defensive measures²⁶. The press-stimulated British bellicosity made Leopold pessimistic; he advised Brockhausen to make sure Prussia, like Austria, would continue to adopt a conciliatory approach. For Leopold, this was the path which, together with a conference of the five Great Powers, would avert war²⁷.

On 22 August 1853, a fresh crisis occurred between Belgium and France. Napoleon was deeply offended by the arranged marriage between the Crown Prince Leopold, Duke of Brabant and the Austrian Archduchess Marie-Henriette. The emperor believed the marriage to be part of a conspiracy against France and summoned the Belgian ambassador²⁸. France was the only nation absent at the Duke's wedding party. Officially, at least, this was to protest against the impunity of the Belgian press, though the Faider Law of 20 December 1852 had been already been passed to deal with these objections²⁹.

The tense relations with France made an approach to the other powers imperative. Russia promised to send 60,000 soldiers if Belgium was threatened, at least according to British Foreign Secretary Malmesbury³⁰. Belgium had finally opened diplomatic

23. FRANÇOIS LORENT, *Léopold Ier et la Chambre des Représentants en 1853. Contribution à l'histoire politico-militaire de Belgique d'après quelques documents inédits*, Namur, 1936 : Leopold I to the Prince of Chimay, 26.4.1853 ("la responsabilité parlementaire devient une pure fiction"). 24. PPCD, 11.5.1853, p. 1355. 25. Freiherr Adolf von Brockhausen (1801-58) was the Prussian envoy to Brussels from 1851 to 1858. 26. GStA PK, I HA Rep. 81 Brüssel, Brockhausen to Friedrich Wilhelm, 12.1.1854 : "afin de ne pas être pris au dépourvu, et avoir quelque poids à mettre dans la balance". 27. For Leopold's insistence on a five power solution during the Turkish-Egyptian War of 1840, see JAN ANCKAER, *Small power diplomacy...* (chapter 3). 28. AGK, Englischer Akten, Winfried Baumgart (ed.), München-Wien, 1988-2006, Nr. 147 : Cowley to Clarendon, 6.6.1853, p. 267. For the relations between Napoleon III and Leopold I and in general between France and Belgium from 1852 onwards, see JEAN-LÉO, *Napoléon III et la Belgique*, Bruxelles, 2003. 29. The Faider law "to punish insults aimed at the head's of foreign states" (article 5) was declared under diplomatic pressure, especially of France. The Belgian authorities hoped to put an end to criticism of Napoleon III in pamphlets and in the radical paper *La Nation*. However, it would take until a modification by the Tesch law of 12 March 1858 before it could effectively be applied; even then the effect turned out to be minimal. For the Belgian press in this period, see PIERRE BAUDSON, *La question de la presse belge de 1852 à 1858. Diplomatie, procès, lois*, master thesis, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1959. In Vienna, Leopold I was interrogated on the subject by the Austrian Foreign Minister Count Buol. A further reform of the press laws was necessary but Leopold, though he agreed with the plaintiffs, asked for time to appease liberal sentiments in Belgium, see AGK, Französischer Akten, München-Wien, 1999-2003, Nr. 174 : Bourqueney to Drouyn de Lhuys, 1.9.1853, p. 447-448. 30. Third Earl of Malmesbury, *Memoirs of an ex-Minister: An Autobiography*, London, 1884, p. 308. James Edward Harris, 2nd Earl of Malmesbury (1807-89), was Foreign Secretary (1852-53 and 1858-59) and Lord Privy Seal (1866-68, 1874-76).



An engraving depicting the Turkish Sultan Abdülmecid, the English Queen Victoria and the French emperor Napoleon III, representing the three most important allies in the battle against the Russian empire during the Crimean War. (unknown artist, Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

relations with Russia in spring of 1853, which had also caused irritation in France³¹. In June 1853 the Tsar congratulated King Leopold on the coming marriage of the Duke of Brabant. He even invited him to visit Saint-Petersburg once the international situation improved³². The Austrians also played their trump card. Since the 1840s, Leopold had owned land in Austria and saw the old Habsburg Empire as a keystone of the European equilibrium³³. In 1853 he spent time in the Austro-German territories with the Crown Prince, making state visits to Berlin and Vienna where they were received with the utmost respect. O'Sullivan³⁴, the Belgian minister in Vienna, even stated that a foreign sovereign had never received such a brilliant reception in the capital before³⁵. Leopold's 'austrophile' policy caused irritation in Paris, London and

Berlin³⁶. His plea for Austria and Prussia to join the alliance against Russia can however be seen as an attempt to counterbalance French pressure on Belgium³⁷.

In a diplomatic 'einzeltgänger' initiative, albeit one condoned by Lord Clarendon³⁸, Leopold sent the francophile Prince of Chimay to Paris to hear French complaints about the Belgian press and general observations on Franco-Belgian relations, and also to explain the Belgian point of view³⁹. While the French press claimed that Chimay's mission was the first step in the establishment of a Franco-Belgian alliance, the government was unhappy with the King's demarche⁴⁰. Irritation was further enhanced by the state visit of Prince Jerome-Napoleon, the cousin of Napoleon III, to Brussels from 30 January to

31. AFO, *PC-F*, Firmin Rogier to de Brouckère, 19.2.1853. Prussia was satisfied with the approach, see GStA PK, *I HA* Rep. 81 Brüssel, III Hauptabteilung, Nr. 799 : Seckendorff to Friedrich Wilhelm IV, 16.2.1852. See also CHARLES TERLINDEN, "L'établissement des relations diplomatiques entre la Belgique et la Russie, 1852-1853", in *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 1923. 32. GStA PK, *I HA* Rep. 81 Brüssel : Brockhausen to Friedrich Wilhelm, 10.6.1853. 33. Leopold had the large property of Fulnek in Moravia (communication of Gustaaf Janssens, former Royal Palace archivist). Other sources indicate Fulnek came in the hands of Baron Stockmar in 1842 who sold it on to the Count of Flanders in 1855. Apart from this, from 1853 to 1914 the King of the Belgians was the patron of the 27th Regiment of the Austrian army. 34. Count Alphonse O'Sullivan De Grass De Séovaud (1798-1866) : his diplomatic career started in Berlin (secretary, 1826), then Saint-Petersburg (1828). In 1833 he was appointed *chargé d'affaires* in Vienna, in 1836 promoted to Resident and finally, in 1837, extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister. In 1838 he directed negotiations for a commercial treaty with the Ottoman Porte, which was signed on 3 April 1838. He remained in Vienna until the end of his life. 35. AFO, *Political Files*, Nr. 10324, O'Sullivan to de Brouckère, 13.5.1853 : "...à aucune époque un souverain étranger n'a reçu de la Cour de Vienne un accueil à la fois plus cordial et plus brillant". 36. VINCENT VIAENE, "De monarchie en de stelling van België in Europa onder Leopold I en Leopold II (1831-1909)", in *Nieuw licht op Leopold I en Leopold II. Het Archief Goffinet*, Brussel, 1997, p. 153. 37. ARP, *GA*, Duke of Brabant's archives, Leopold I to the Duke of Brabant, 11.12.1854. 38. George Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon (1800-70) was Foreign Secretary during the Crimean War (1853-58) and again between 1865 and 1866 and from 1868 to 1870. 39. AGK, *Französischer Akten*, Nr. 196 : Walewski to Thouvenel, 20.9.1853, p. 493 : Leopold corresponded with Clarendon, who in turn spoke to resident minister Vandeweyer about Chimay's orders. Chimay would also function as a liaison between Napoleon III and the Duke of Coburg, Ernst II (1818-93), the brother of Prince-Consort Albert, see *idem*, Chimay to Ernst, 9 & 13.5.1854, pp. 171-172 & 183. 40. AFO, *PC-GB*, de Brouckère to Vandeweyer, 2.2.1854.

2 February 1854. The visit was an element of the British policy to stimulate good relations between the Brussels and Paris courts in order to weaken French annexationist tendencies towards Belgium⁴¹. As soon as the press started reporting on the planned return visit, it became harder for the Belgian government to mount a defence against accusations of bias in favour of France. In Prussia the visit was considered a moral breach of Belgian neutrality⁴². If war broke out, how could de Brouckère explain the presence of the Belgian heir to the throne in Paris?

Although de Butenval was eventually recalled for his undiplomatic threat to Belgium, France continued to conceal its true intentions. At the start of October 1853, Foreign Minister Drouyn de Lhuys⁴³ declared that Holland, Belgium, Spain and Portugal were at the mercy of France and Britain⁴⁴. Probably ironically, Drouyn de Lhuys also declared he deplored the fact that Leopold had not chosen the Greek throne instead of Belgium's. Indeed, from the start the Greek king Otto of Bavaria

had been an advocate of the Tsar. Drouyn de Lhuys considered that Leopold could have transformed the Orient with his connections and dynastic ties⁴⁵. However, during the opening of the French parliamentary year of 1854, Napoleon adopted a smooth tone: France had no expansionist intentions whatsoever; the time of conquest was over⁴⁶. The Franco-British alliance was already a reality⁴⁷.

When, Sweden and Denmark declared their neutrality at the end of 1853, de Brouckère addressed a circular to all diplomats in which he reminded every agent of Belgian neutrality. Political preferences were unacceptable and all contact with foreign courts and diplomats had to be conducted with this in mind. De Brouckère also explained to Barrot⁴⁸, the French envoy in Brussels, that Belgian neutrality would be defended by military means if necessary. If France or Britain were to go to war against Austria or Prussia, though the position of these nations was all but clear at the time, then Barrot could

41. In any case, this was the viewpoint of the Austrian minister in Brussels, Vrinz, see Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, *Gesandtschaft Belgien*, Vrinz to Buol-Schauenstein, 2.2.1854. 42. AFO, PC-P, Nothomb to de Brouckère, 28.2.1854.

43. Edouard Drouyn de Lhuys (1805-81) started his career as a diplomat (attaché in Madrid, secretary in The Hague, 1833-36, ambassador in Madrid, 1840), before entering parliament in 1842. Minister of Foreign Affairs at the end of 1848, he returned to diplomacy in 1849 as extraordinary envoy to London. He was involved in Napoleon's coup and was appointed Foreign Minister again in 1852. He resigned in 1856, but in 1862 he recalled to the Foreign Office (until 1866). 44. AGK, Österreichischer Akten, München-Wien, 1979-1980, Nr. 182 : Hübner to Buol, 3.10.1853, p. 355. 45. AFO, PC-F, Rogier to de Brouckère, 27.7.1853. His Majesty, Drouyn added, "aurait été aujourd'hui l'homme de la situation et les choses auraient pris une autre face... Qui sait la brillante destinée à laquelle S.M. pouvait être appelée ?". This was also a reference to Leopold's candidacy for the Greek throne in 1830, see JAN ANCKAER, *Small power...*, chapter 3. 46. ALFRED DE RIDDER, *Le mariage...* (chapter II) : "le temps des conquêtes est passé sans retour". 47. The Russian historian Troubetzkoy expressed it eloquently : "The 'Belgian Question' was the catalyst that changed the British attitude towards the 'Eastern Question'", see ALEXIS TROUBETZKOY, *A Brief History of the Crimean War*, London, 2006, p. 120.

48. Théodore Adolphe Barrot (1803-70) had been plenipotentiary minister in Brazil (1849), Lisbon (1849) and Naples (1851-53), before his appointment in Brussels (1853-58). Afterwards he served as ambassador in Madrid (1858-64). In 1864 he became a senator.



Portrait of the young Belgian liberal politician Henri de Brouckère. During the Crimean War, he served as both Prime Minister and minister of the Foreign Affairs Department. In that latter position, he was closely involved with international diplomacy. (artist : Charles Baugniet, Liberaal Archief)

count on Belgium being an impregnable obstacle. Belgium's frontier would serve as a shield to protect France⁴⁹. Barrot could hardly believe what he heard and hesitated to interpret de Brouckère's informally-uttered words. De Brouckère and Barrot often met in this period and it seems clear that Brussels' efforts to maintain good relations with Paris were prescribed by the Franco-British collaboration⁵⁰. Simultaneously, there were talks in Paris between Drouyn de Lhuys and Firmin Rogier, the Belgian minister who had been somewhat overshadowed by Chimay's mission⁵¹. Drouyn de Lhuys predicted a limited war of one to two months. When the French minister asked for a Belgian reaction, Rogier repeated the content of de Brouckère's circular. Drouyn de Lhuys found this strange because explicitly re-declaring neutrality raised doubts on the sincerity of the statement⁵².

Initially, Leopold wanted to repeat his peacemaker role of 1840. In October 1853 he travelled to London to act as a marriage

broker for Prince Napoleon of Westphalia, a cousin and heir of the French emperor, and Princess Mary of Cambridge, a niece of Queen Victoria. The negotiations failed and Leopold began to realize it would be pointless and even dangerous to go against the public's jingoism stimulated by Prime Minister Palmerston. In the British press Prince-consort Albert, who tried to soften the tone, was accused of being an agent of a "clique of Austro-Belgo-Cobourg-Orléans" and a docile instrument of Russian imperialism⁵³. Leopold contacted the Austrian chancellor and, through Brockhausen, the Prussian king. From his niece Victoria and from Lord Aberdeen⁵⁴, he obtained their promise to try to convince the British cabinet to appoint a moderate diplomat to assist Lord Stratford⁵⁵, the "veritable calamity", in Constantinople⁵⁶. Leopold's peace mission was badly received in the British press, which suspected him of trying to breach the Franco-British alliance, although he had only aimed to prevent a further escalation into large-scale war⁵⁷. The King found the accusations against him absurd

49. AGK, *Französischer Akten*, Nr. 340 : Barrot to Drouyn de Lhuys, 3.1.1854, p. 744 : "sa frontière servirait de bouclier à la France". 50. Barrot reported on a laudatory speech by de Brouckère on the 'peaceable' politics of Napoleon III, at the same time attacking the increasing Russian influence, against which the British would be unable to resist without the French, see AD, *PC-B*, Nr. 35 : Barrot to Drouyn, 19.1.1854. In the same period Bismarck wrote to Manteuffel on the Belgian government assuring France's benevolence because in Britain the belief in the necessity of war was growing. 51. Firmin Rogier (1791-1875) was the eldest brother of Charles Rogier; in 1830 he was appointed secretary in Paris, then *chargé d'affaires* and later plenipotentiary minister (until 1864). 52. AFO, *PC-F*, Rogier to de Brouckère, 19.2.1854 : "une femme véritablement honnête ne parle pas aux autres de sa vertu et tout le monde l'admet. Eh bien! Il doit en être de même de la Belgique", see also HORST LADEMACHER, *Die belgische Neutralität...*, p. 168. 53. OLIVIER DEFRENCE, *Léopold I et le clan Cobourg*, Bruxelles, 2004, p. 253. 54. George Hamilton Gordon, 4th Earl of Aberdeen (1784-60) was initially a diplomat (ambassador in Vienna, 1813-14), then Foreign Affairs minister (1828-30, 1841-46), before becoming Prime Minister (1852-55). 55. 1st Viscount Stratford Canning de Redcliffe was the British ambassador to the Porte (1825-28, 1841-58), a member of the House of Commons (1828-42) and the House of Lords (1852-80). 56. GStA PK, *IHA Rep.* 81 Brüssel : Brockhausen to Friedrich Wilhelm, 10.6.1853. 57. ARP, *Leopold I Archives*, Leopold I to Queen Victoria, 9.1.1854.

because an intimate, close and enduring relationship between Britain and France was nothing but advantageous to Belgium⁵⁸.

Leopold's efforts were appreciated. The Tsar informed Camille de Briey (1799-1877), former Minister of Foreign Affairs and now Belgium's senior agent in Saint-Petersburg, that he was very pleased with Leopold's conciliation. The Tsar assured Belgium that France had too much worries at home for Napoleon to constitute a real threat; if he did act against Belgium, then both Europe and Russia would react⁵⁹. Despite the encouragement from the Tsar, Leopold's views on Russia's responsibilities were clear. He could not help but support the Turkish claim to what they were legitimately entitled to, specifically Russia's previous conquests in the Ottoman Empire⁶⁰.

Reluctance imposed by de Brouckère had to give way to compliance when faced with demands from court. The Duke of Brabant

had a special interest in Blondeel's reports from Constantinople and de Brouckère agreed to a direct correspondence with the prince, on condition he would transmit a copy to the Foreign Office⁶¹. However, the good relations between Blondeel and the Prince irritated the department⁶². When Blondeel heard that Foreign Minister Mustafa Reshid Pasha (1800-58) wanted to negotiate a loan in Paris and London through the Minister of Commerce, Mehmet Namik Pasha (1804-92), he suggested changing the mission's destination to Brussels instead⁶³. He provided a letter of recommendation for the Duke of Brabant to the delegation. Brabant would lend his name and fame to the enterprise. De Brouckère was incensed. To involve the prince was a clear violation of Belgian neutrality, especially in view of the international political instability. He urged Blondeel to strictly follow the government's guidelines⁶⁴. Blondeel had a more creative view. Still, during the preparative phase of the Crimean War, Britain, France, Prussia and Austria were discussing a proposal in a

58. *Idem* : "si quelque chose nous est personnellement avantageux, c'est bien de voir l'Angleterre et la France intimement liées et pour longtemps – je devrais dire pour toujours". In the same terms he wrote to his confidant Conway, see ARP, *Conway Archives*, Leopold I to Edouard de Conway, 15.1.1854 : "notre intérêt est une alliance anglo-gallicane et la faire durer le plus possible". Leopold complained that European public opinion was misinformed about his mediation attempts. The same letter also sheds light on Leopold's methods. He advised his collaborators on articles to publish in the British press; sometimes a piece was considered too long, too concise or premature. One of his correspondents in London (through Conway) was Charles Drouet (1805-63), Vandeweyer's replacement. In February 1854, Drouet announced war was inevitable, a conclusion he came to on the basis of the public debate on the rights and privileges of the Greek and Latin churches in the Ottoman Empire, see ARP, *Conway Archives*, Nr. 49, Drouet to Conway, 9.2.1854. For Drouet see AFO, *Personnel Files*, Drouet. **59.** AFO, PC-R, de Briey to de Brouckère, 31.12.1853. **60.** *Léopold I et son règne*, Archives Générales du Royaume, Bruxelles, 1965, p. 184 : Leopold I to the Duke of Brabant, 5.12.1853. **61.** *Idem*, de Brouckère to Blondeel, 1.9.1853. **62.** The Duke of Brabant repeatedly asked Blondeel to undertake missions, but usually these did not fit in the diplomat's agenda, see *idem*, the Duke of Brabant to Blondeel, 9.11.1853; Blondeel to de Brouckère, 3.9.1854. **63.** From November 1853 to May 1854 Namik stayed in Paris and London, but returned home empty-handed, see OLIVE ANDERSON, "Great Britain and the Beginning of the Ottoman Public Debt, 1854-1855", in *The Historical Journal*, 1964, p. 47-63. **64.** AFO, PC-T, Blondeel to de Brouckère, 18.2.1854; de Brouckère to Blondeel, 15.3.1854.



Behind the screens, King Leopold I of Belgium was a key player in preserving his country's neutrality during the turbulent years of the Crimean War. (Painting by Nicaise De Keyser, 1856, Stadhuis Antwerpen)

salon next to the room in which Blondeel was taking minutes of the evening's discussions. Previously he had been up all night convincing Stratford Canning to organise such a meeting. Although the discussed proposal did not hold, the British counter-proposal recuperated the four nation arbitrage which had led to a settlement of the 1840 crisis. Blondeel had intensely lobbied for such a solution⁶⁵. Curiously, no reprimand followed⁶⁶.

III. After the declaration of war

After the declaration of war, de Brouckère declared in Senate (12 May 1854) that the Belgian government enjoyed excellent relations with all the nations involved. When the war would effectively start, Belgium had to do nothing, not even declare its neutrality as some other countries had done; neutrality was an attitude to adopt for these states while for Belgium it was a permanent situation. To doubt Belgium's neutrality, would be to doubt its proper existence, de Brouckère added. The official Belgian line was determined by the treaties on which its independence was based and those treaties imposed permanent and absolute neutrality⁶⁷.

From the summer of 1854 onwards a rumour circulated in diplomatic milieus, repeated in the Belgian press, that Belgium was preparing to abandon its neutrality. French and British public opinion expected the imminent sacrifice of Belgian neutrality, encouraged by Napoleon's diplomacy which considered the Crimean War as a means to bind Belgium politically and economically to France. The government, and especially de Brouckère, believed more than ever in strict neutrality when, on 8 August 1854, Austria was pressured by France into participating in the ongoing negotiations. An open conflict between Leopold and his government erupted over a visit to the French troops in Northern France. Leopold wanted to greet Napoleon in the military camp of Boulogne, where the emperor would inspect the troops leaving for the Crimea. According to the Prussian king, however, the camp would also be used as a base for the invasion of Prussia along the North and Baltic Sea⁶⁸. The Prussian worries were the result of press articles speculating on a concerted Franco-Belgian invasion of Prussia⁶⁹. The de Brouckère cabinet was alarmed; Belgian neutrality was in danger and the King's visit would only complicate matters. De Brouckère threatened to hand

65. *Idem*, Blondeel to de Brouckère, 25.9. and 4.10.1853. 35. Advertisement for *Le Bien public* in *L'Étudiant catholique*, 15 October 1929, p. 7a, found in University of Ghent Archives: "*Vie catholique / Liberté d'enseignement / Défense des minorités linguistiques*". 66. In February 1854, Blondeel reflected that only an alliance of neutrals could save the Ottoman Empire. This alliance would have to be led by Leopold. Blondeel rhetorically asked who would have the best chance of "*en lui [the alliance] imprimant son véritable caractère ? Il n'y a qu'un homme en Europe, je crois n'avoir pas besoin de le nommer à votre excellence*", see *idem*, 2.2.1854. 67. PPS, 12.5.1854, p. 246: "*Nous n'avions donc ni à la [neutrality] notifier, ni à la définir, ni à la justifier*". 68. AGK, Französischer Akten, Nr. 69: Moustier to Drouyn de Lhuys, 15.5.1854, p. 191. 69. *Idem*, p. 193. In August 1854 the Prussian ambassador in Paris, Hatzfeldt, was on his way from Berlin when he became unwell. He halted in Brussels and received an audience with Leopold. During the conversation, Leopold stated that if France demanded the German and Prussian provinces on the left bank of the Rhine, Britain would not resist in order to avoid jeopardizing its alliance with France. When Hatzfeldt replied that Belgium would also be in danger in that case, the king replied the British would not tolerate Antwerp falling into French

in his resignation if the King persisted⁷⁰. Leopold persevered because he thought cancelling the meeting with the Emperor would be the equivalent of a hostile act. He was willing, as a concession, to abstain from any military ceremony during the visit but this did not prevent his government from resigning⁷¹. Leopold received support from Queen Victoria who called the attitude of his ministers “very wrong”⁷². As planned, the King and his eldest son left Ostend on 2 September 1854 for Boulogne. The meeting with Napoleon was cordial and Leopold expressed his sympathies for the Franco-British alliance in order to counteract the negative publicity that the Coburgs had previously received⁷³. Leopold’s diplomatic capacities were tested upon returning to Brussels in securing the continuation of his cabinet. He succeeded, but the ministers’ attitude continued to trouble him. They had abandoned themselves to “the most absurd

reasoning I have ever heard”, he wrote to Victoria. They had been “awfully childish”, their position “wonderfully absurd”⁷⁴. The King’s opinion was shared by Napoleon who thought the action of the ministers had been an “unwarranted interference with the King’s freedom of action”⁷⁵.

The most prominent advocate of leaving neutrality was eighteen year-old crown prince Leopold, who admired Napoleon and had already met Prince Jerome-Bonaparte, Napoleon’s cousin, during his visit to Brussels in January 1854⁷⁶. The result of this meeting was a memo entitled “*Note confidentielle rédigée exclusivement au point de vue français pour servir de texte aux conversations du Prince de Chimay sur la nécessité d’agrandir la Belgique*”, addressed to the Belgian envoy in Paris, the Prince of Chimay. In the memo, the Duke of Brabant proposed a secret alliance with France at the expense of Holland⁷⁷.

hands. Furthermore Leopold underlined his preference for a joint entry into the coalition of Prussia and Austria, see AGK, Preussischer Akten, Nr. 18 : Hatzfeldt to Manteuffel, 18.8.1854, p. 96. **70.** ARP, GA, Leopold I to the Duke of Brabant, 12 and 15.8.1854; JEAN STENGERS, *L’action du Roi en Belgique depuis 1831, Pouvoir et influence. Essai de typologie des modes d’action du Roi*, Paris/Louvain-la-Neuve, 1992, p. 256. The king also supported Napoleon’s Mexican expedition, which would install Leopold’s daughter Charlotte on the Mexican throne. **71.** ARP, *Copies of letters of Leopold I to Queen Victoria*, 1.9.1854; JEAN STENGERS, *L’action...*, p. 256. **72.** ARP, GA, Leopold I to the Duke of Brabant, 17.8.1854; JEAN STENGERS, *L’Action...*, p. 256. **73.** To Daniel Thomas the Boulogne trip was proof of Leopold “being less neutral than his ministers”, see *The guarantee...*, p. 138. **74.** ARP, *Copies of letters of Leopold I to Queen Victoria*, 25.8., 1.9., 2.10. and 20.11.1854; JEAN STENGERS, *L’action...*, p. 257. **75.** THEODORE MARTIN, *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*, III, London, 1880, p. 118; JEAN STENGERS, *L’action...*, p. 257. **76.** The prince was invited to Brussels by Leopold I, see MB, 31.1.1854, p. 339; 2.2.1854, p. 383 and 3.2.1854, p. 377. From the start the Duke of Brabant ordered maps of the military operations in the Ottoman Empire through Adrien Goffinet. He instructed Goffinet to obtain information about the start of the conflict from General Renard as he was well informed on publications on the Turco-Russian War of 1828. Goffinet synthesized Prussian and Polish studies, procured British naval maps, a plan of Sebastopol and he ordered topographical maps of the Crimea from the French *Dépôt de la Guerre*, see ARP, GA, Correspondence between Goffinet and the Duke of Brabant, Goffinet to the Duke of Brabant, 25.1.1854; the Duke of Brabant to Goffinet, 5.4.1854; Goffinet to the Duke of Brabant, 5.4.1854 and 12.9.1855. **77.** ARP, GA, Archives of the private secretariat of the Duke of Brabant, memo of the Duke to the Prince of Chimay, 22.4.1854; the Duke of Brabant to the Prince of Chimay, s.d.; memo from the Duke of Brabant to the prince of Chimay (annex to the previous letter), s.d.



The Duke of Brabant, the later King Leopold II (sitting upright in the forefront) during a trip through Egypt and Palestine in early 1855. With the Crimean War fully underway, he avoided Constantinople on his journey back. (Archief Koninklijk Paleis, Algemene fotoverzameling, nr. 1063)

Belgium would take over the so-called ‘irredenta’ of Catholic Northern Limburg, southern Luxembourg, and also the Dutch colony of Java. According to the Prince, these annexations would be a completion of the Belgian Revolution. The plan was to surprise Britain, which would have its hands full in the Crimea, with a ‘fait accompli’. With France looking the other way, Holland’s weak army could be overrun and, if France would abstain from interfering, Prussia would do so as well⁷⁸. Meanwhile, the Duke of Brabant ordered his aide-de-camp, Adrien Goffinet⁷⁹, to gather information. To that end, in October 1854, Goffinet made an inspection tour resulting in several reports on the military strength of Holland⁸⁰. Meanwhile, Leopold had no idea what his son was up to. The Prince of Chimay was discrete about the prince’s plans, though he found them unwise and over-ambitious. The Duke of Brabant, realising that Chimay was afraid of being compromised, called him an advocate of the other cause but continued to send him instructions⁸¹.

Although the King’s ideas sometimes seemed to support the Prince’s own initiatives, Leopold instead preferred territorial extension to be in concert with Holland and with the permission of Prussia. It would have to be

facilitated by serving the allies⁸². The King’s idea centred on the border town of Maastricht; which the French preferred to see in Belgian hands than occupied by the Prussians. To make this happen, negotiations in The Hague would be needed without involving the Dutch envoy in Brussels, Baron Gericke⁸³, who would immediately inform his sovereign who was known to abhor the idea. Leopold also suggested Belgium could take over some colonial obligations from Britain to release the pressure that its own overstretched military was suffering⁸⁴. The King’s ideas were perhaps of a more feasible nature than those of his son.

The Prince of Chimay’s discretion towards the proposals of the Duke of Brabant did not last. He discussed the Duke’s ideas with O’Sullivan, the Belgian minister in Vienna. Apparently, the latter had been working on an alternative plan: rephrasing a new concept of neutrality which would be more to the liking of the King. O’Sullivan was prepared, as was the Crown Prince, to abandon neutrality as it had been defined in 1831 in exchange for new territorial acquisitions. This was to be sought through greater independence from France and through broader involvement with the allied cause. To O’Sullivan, territorial expansion would be at the cost of Prussia,

78. *Idem*, Project of a letter from the Duke of Brabant to a collaborator of the Prince of Chimay, s.d. **79.** Baron Adrien Goffinet (1812-86) was a cavalry lieutenant-general, ordnance officer to Leopold I (1851-53) and the Duke of Brabant (1853-65), aide-de camp to Leopold II (1866-86) and keeper of the personal archives of Leopold I. **80.** See the correspondence between the Duke of Brabant and Goffinet of 25 August and 14 October 1854 in ARP, GA, Archives of the private secretariat of the Duke of Brabant, D20. **81.** *Idem*, the Duke of Brabant to the Prince of Chimay, s.d.. For the relations between Chimay and the Duke of Brabant and Leopold I, see JEAN STENGERS, *L’action...*, p. 252-253. **82.** *Idem*, Archives of the private secretariat of the Duke of Brabant, Leopold I to the Duke of Brabant, 15.8.1854 (also published in VINCENT VIAENE, “De monarchie...”, p. 161). **83.** Baron Joseph Louis Heinrich Alfred Gericke van Herwijnen (1814-99) started off as a secretary and councillor in Paris (1839-51). For 38 years he was the Dutch envoy in Brussels (1851-70), afterwards he became Foreign Minister (1871-74). **84.** DANIEL THOMAS, *The guarantee...*, p. 136.

which sympathized with Russia; Holland had good relations with the anti-Russian alliance. If the Crimean War dragged on and Prussia, together with parts of Germany, was to be drawn in on the Russian side, France and Britain might want to ask Belgium to take up positions on the Rhine⁸⁵. A Belgian engagement in the Crimean War on the side of France and Britain would be rewarded with expansion on the Rhine⁸⁶. As Austria would soon join, according to O'Sullivan, it would be advisable to prepare for such a scenario but it was crucial to remain on excellent terms with the Great Powers⁸⁷. O'Sullivan went even further, believing that, after the Crimean War, the Ottoman Empire would be so weakened it would become possible to acquire parts of it. The question remains, however, to what extent the content of his letters to the Duke of Brabant was influenced by the identity of the recipient. When O'Sullivan wrote to the Crown Prince that a solution to the present conflict could be to remove the Sultan and, if possible, proclaim a Christian king in Constantinople, this was specifically destined for his princely correspondent. Furthermore, this Christian, preferentially Catholic, king

would be at the head of a neutral state which had to fulfil the same role in the Orient as Belgium did in the west. Belgium might even be the country to provide this king⁸⁸. It is hard to believe that the experienced O'Sullivan could convincingly put these extreme and dangerous ideas in the head of the successor to the throne, but it remains a fact that he would later be involved in the prince's subsequent controversial projects⁸⁹.

Only if the Crimean War became a general war as the result of a Franco-Prussian conflict would Leopold considered executing O'Sullivan's plan, albeit just its former part⁹⁰. The King's policy was more directed at preventing an escalation of the conflict by reinforcing the bonds between the mid-European powers and France and Britain⁹¹. In any case, some of this must have been leaked because ties between Prussia and Holland were suddenly strengthened when the former offered the latter a regiment to help defend Dutch territory⁹². To some extent the plans for expansion on the Rhine were serious and perhaps more widely supported than it seemed. A few years later, Jules Greindl, the

85. ARP, GA, Archives of the private secretariat of the Duke of Brabant, O'Sullivan to the Duke of Brabant, s.d. [after 15.6.1854] : O'Sullivan mentioned a long and "formidable" war. **86.** ÉMILE BANNING, *Les origines...*, p. 100, note 1. **87.** ARP, GA, Archives of the private secretariat of the Duke of Brabant, O'Sullivan to the Duke of Brabant, 31.7.1854 and s.d. [after 15.6.1854] : "*Si la France est un jour bien persuadé que notre neutralité lui a été utile et peut l'être encore, elle se montrera favorable à tout ce qui pouvait ajouter à l'efficacité de notre attitude respectable en cas de guerre*". **88.** *Idem* : "...il faudra mettre un Roi chrétien et catholique à Constantinople (...). Il devra jouer en Orient le rôle que la Belgique joue en Occident. La Maison de Belgique faut fournir un Roi à Constantinople. Il y a une foule de raisons pour demander que de toutes les familles régnantes, la plus apte à fournir cette nouvelle Dynastie, c'est la nôtre". **89.** The shrewd O'Sullivan played a facilitating role, as Belgian minister in Vienna, during talks between the agents of Britain, France, Austria, Prussia and Russia. He lived a floor above the British ambassador and his apartments were used as "neutral ground" for the allies' meetings with the Russian ambassador, see *The Manchester Guardian*, 3.1.1855. **90.** At least that is what he wrote to his niece Victoria, see DANIEL THOMAS, *The guarantee...*, p. 138. **91.** VINCENT VIAENE, "De monarchie...", p. 161. **92.** ARP, GA, Leopold I to the Duke of Brabant, 1.1.1855.

then-secretary at the Constantinople legation, wrote to senator Baron Jules d'Anethan⁹³ to remind him to reopen the case of the Rhine borders as it seemed everything Napoleon suggested in Europe became reality. Furthermore, Greindl also had information on negotiations to that end which had started before the resignation of the French Foreign Minister Walewski on 28 December 1859⁹⁴.

In public ceremonies, Leopold respected the government's course of complete Belgian neutrality. At the opening of parliament of 7 November 1854, he addressed the assembled chambers with a message of confidence and security. More than ever, in the middle of a war ravaging parts of Europe, Belgium felt the trust and sympathy of the Great Powers : from this privileged position, Belgium could actively strive for peace⁹⁵. When the war machine was turning at full speed, Leopold condemned Russia's attitude in a letter to Baron Nothomb⁹⁶, though at the same time

hoped it would not deteriorate too severely as this could endanger the European balance of power⁹⁷. In December 1854 Leopold sent a letter to his Prussian colleague, urging him to join the allies⁹⁸. Prussia chose an alternative. It sent an envoy to Brussels and The Hague to make a plea for a league of neutral states⁹⁹. Eventually, Leopold's well-intentioned 'interference' caused growing irritation. Queen Victoria worried about his influence on Prime Minister Aberdeen, who loathed war, and she found it unsuitable to strengthen these feelings once war had already been declared¹⁰⁰.

IV. After Piedmont-Sardinia's entry in the war

When Piedmont-Sardinia unexpectedly joined the Franco-British coalition by treaty of 10 January 1855, Belgian neutrality came under massive pressure. The introduction to

93. Baron Jules Joseph d'Anethan (1803-88) was a Catholic delegate (1844-48) and senator (1849-88), Justice minister (1843-47), War minister (1846), later Prime Minister and Foreign minister (1870-71). **94.** AFO, *Microfilms*, Nr. 518, Jules d'Anethan Papers, Greindl to d'Anethan, 5.4.1860. Count Florian Joseph Colonna Walewski (1810-68) was the son of Napoleon I and his mistress Countess Walevski. He was appointed extraordinary envoy to Florence, Naples and London (1851-55); Foreign Minister in 1855 and member of the Senate (1855-60), then of the *Assemblée*, which he presided before returning to the Senate. **95.** *PPS*, 7.11.1854, p. 1. **96.** Baron Jean-Baptiste Nothomb (1805-81) was an influential figure : he co-wrote the Belgian constitution and occupied the new ministry of Public Works (1837) which would be responsible for extensive railway construction. In 1840 he was appointed ambassador to the German Confederation, but he was recalled to lead a unionist cabinet from 1841 to 1845. Afterwards he was re-installed in Berlin where he stayed in office until his death. **97.** GSA, *Private Archives Nothomb*, Leopold I to Nothomb, 16.12.1854. **98.** AGK, *Englischer Akten*, Nr. 31: Bloomfield to Clarendon, 15.12.1854, p. 129; AGK, *Preussischer Akten*, München-Wien, 1990-1991, Nr. 151 : Brockhausen to Manteuffel, 2.1.1855, p. 341-343. **99.** AGK, *Englischer Akten*, Nr. 31: Bloomfield to Clarendon, 15.12.1854, p. 129; AGK, *Preussischer Akten*, München-Wien, 1990-1991, Nr. 151 : Brockhausen to Manteuffel, 2.1.1855, p. 341-343. **100.** *Idem*, Nr. 180 : Victoria to Leopold I, 31.3.1854, p. 309. Leopold thought the Tsar unenthusiastic about going to war; he suggested forcing the Porte to completely emancipate its Christian subjects, see *Selections from the correspondence of George, Earl of Aberdeen*, vol. XI, London, 1854-1855, p. 79.



In 1855 count Alexandre Colonna-Walewski succeeded Drouyn de Lhuys as the French minister of Foreign Affairs. As such, he was an essential figure in the increasing diplomatic pressure on Belgium. He was also one of the main French negotiators during the talks that would lead to the Paris Treaty, ending the Crimean War in 1956. (by artist Pierre-Louis Pierson, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris)

the treaty, directed at the states which had remained neutral, contained the following : “Neutrality, often possible for first-rank powers, is rarely possible for those of the second tier unless they find themselves in special political or geographic conditions. However, history shows us that neutrality rarely ends happily; its least bitter fruit often feeds the suspicion and distain of both parties”¹⁰¹.

Possibly, the “special political and geographic circumstances” were a reference to Belgium which thus implicitly saw its neutrality confirmed. However, there is no doubt there now was serious French pressure on the Belgian government to join the now Franco-British-Sardinian alliance¹⁰². On 6 January 1855, Drouyn de Lhuys proposed that the government send Belgian troops to relieve the French who were occupying Rome; that way, a corps of about 3,500 men would be free to join the operations in the Crimea. The proposal was an attempt to involve Belgium in the war effort under a pretext of keeping peace in Italy. As was to be expected, the government refused¹⁰³. De Brouckère made it clear the Belgian refusal was applicable to all hypothetical

scenarios including if a Belgian occupation of Rome were to be condoned by the Great Powers – an idea championed by Pope Pius X. The British viewpoint was clear. Clarendon declared that “the existence of Belgium depends on its neutrality, and it would neither answer to her, nor to us... that she should violate it”. If Prussia were to side with Russia in the war, then the situation could be different and with “proper precautions (i.e. definitions of causes)”, Clarendon declared himself in favour of Belgian participation¹⁰⁴.

One illustration of the conflicting views on Belgian neutrality is the manner in which the Duke of Brabant, returning from a voyage to Egypt and Palestine early in 1855, caused some panic. The Crown Prince would neglect Constantinople because of the political situation. Blondeel and the Foreign Office thought this sensible as the war-mongering climate in the city made any impartiality almost impossible¹⁰⁵. However, as an illustration of allied pressure on the neutral states, the French and British ambassadors, together with Foreign Affairs minister A’ali Pasha (1815-71), wanted the prince to visit the city¹⁰⁶. They tried

101. MB, 1 February 1855, p. 370 : “La neutralité souvent possible pour les puissances de premier ordre, l’est rarement pour celles de deuxième ordre, si elles ne se trouvent pas placées dans des circonstances politiques et géographiques spéciales. Toutefois, l’histoire nous montre la neutralité rarement heureuse; son fruit le moins amer est souvent de fournir aliment aux suspicions et aux dédains des deux partis”. **102.** No explicit proposal to Belgium to join the war was made, at least that is what Alfred De Ridder concluded, see “La neutralité belge...” , p. 265. **103.** “...car nous rendrions disponibles des troupes françaises qui iraient renforcer l’armée qui combat les Russes”, see JEAN LORETTE, “Problèmes...”, p. 571. The Belgian minister in Paris, Rogier, even received a warning as he was judged of having provoked the offer by imprudent communication. **104.** AGK, Englischer Akten, Nr. 191: Clarendon to Abercromby, 20.2.1855, p. 344. **105.** ARP, GA, Archives of the private secretariat of the Duke of Brabant, Blondeel to the Duke of Brabant, 9.2.1855. **106.** *Idem*, Blondeel to the Duke of Brabant, 1.3.1855.

to convince Blondeel that a state visit to Constantinople would be easy to justify in Saint-Petersburg, but Blondeel replied that, if Belgium maintained its neutrality, it would have nothing to explain to anybody¹⁰⁷. Eventually, the Duke would not visit Constantinople, but this would have nothing to do with the war.

In parliament, opposition to leaving neutrality remained strong. The liberal, Auguste Orts¹⁰⁸, interrogated de Brouckère in the Chamber on 16 February 1855 – this was just after the plans for territorial compensation in the Rhineland in exchange for participation in the war had leaked out (*L'Émancipation* published the story on 14 February). Orts demanded to know whether Belgium had been invited to follow the example of Piedmont and to overstep its imposed neutrality, whether any approaches had been made by one of the powers and, if so, what would be the attitude of the government. De Brouckère formally denied any

demand had been made from Belgium and underlined the government's desire to respect article 7 of the 19 April 1839 treaty. After several more interventions, parliament finally agreed this would be the general course to follow¹⁰⁹. On 22 February instructions to this effect were sent to the Belgian agents in London, Berlin, Vienna, Frankfurt and The Hague, which would remain the government's official guidelines until the end of the conflict¹¹⁰.

Meanwhile, the international press speculated on Belgium's position. When Sardinia entered the Franco-British alliance, the general opinion was that Hannover, Portugal, Holland, Sweden and Belgium would soon join the coalition against Russia¹¹¹. The British press in particular condemned Belgium's attitude, which was alternately described as 'Francophobe' or 'Russophile'. Brussels was accused of being a breeding ground for Russian intrigue. When Russian diplomats were expelled from France and Britain, they

107. AFO, *Political Files*, Nr. 10324, Blondeel to the Duke of Brabant, 1.3.1855: "...la Belgique, en restant dans sa neutralité, n'a rien à expliquer à personne". **108.** Auguste Orts (1814-80) was a lawyer at the Courts of Appeal (1833-48) and Cassation (1848-80) and a professor of political economy at the *Université libre de Bruxelles* (1844-80); he was a liberal delegate (1848-80) and a communal councillor (1858-69 and 1873-80) and alderman (1869-73) of Brussels. **109.** *PPCD*, 16.2.1855, p. 744-746. **110.** The large majority of the Belgian diplomats respected this code of conduct. At a soirée in The Hague in February 1855, the French envoy approached the Belgian and Turkish ministers to suggest the latter to convince the former of quitting neutrality. The Belgian minister replied this would be difficult as his government held on with both hands to neutrality, and that even if it had two pair of hands, these too would certainly be employed for the benefit of neutrality. Taking this in, the French ambassador in The Hague, Baron d'André, gave Belgium six months upon which a Dutch minister, who happened to hear the conversation, broke in to announce Belgium already had two pair of hands, the Dutch pair included, see AFO, *PC-N*, Wilmar to de Brouckère, 9.2.1855. **111.** On Swedish neutrality, see FREDRIK BAJER, "Le système scandinave de neutralité pendant la guerre de Crimée et son origine historique", in *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 1900, p. 259-288; AXEL JONASSON, "The Crimean War, the beginning of strict Swedish Neutrality and the Myth of Swedish intervention in the Baltic", in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1973 (4), p. 244-253; for the Danish position, see EMANUEL HALICZ, *Danish Neutrality during the Crimean War, 1853-1856: Denmark between the Hammer and the Anvil*, Odense, 1977.

found refuge in Brussels. Furthermore, there were pro-Russia sentiments from within the Belgian high command; several high-ranking officers were ill-disposed towards the allies. The paper *L'Indépendance* was labelled the Tsar's official bulletin by the British press. British suspicions seemed to be confirmed as *L'Étoile du Nord*, generally considered as 'made in Russia', started to appear in Brussels from the summer of 1855 onwards. Although the paper was officially financed by a merchants union, with as chief editor the Frenchman Crétineau-Joly¹¹², its daily management was run by a Belgian front-man, Victor Capellemans. One of the editors was a brother of the former Justice Minister Faider, a republican lawyer¹¹³. Chreptovitsj¹¹⁴, the Russian envoy in Brussels, denied any involvement but this was dismissed by the powers¹¹⁵. Leopold and his government were also dissatisfied with the establishment of *L'Étoile du Nord*. The British ambassador in Brussels, Howard de Walden¹¹⁶, confirmed there was a general feeling of displeasure

towards Russia "for this abuse of the liberty of the press"¹¹⁷. Howard was afraid that Belgium's relations with its neighbours and most loyal allies would be damaged. Nevertheless, his respect for the freedom of press determined his position. "I always stand by the liberty of the press – upon principle", Howard stated in a despatch to Clarendon, "for there is nothing printed here which can do anything like the mischief of our almost daily speeches in Parl"¹¹⁸. In June 1855, the French ambassador Barrot held a meeting with Vilain XIII¹¹⁹ and Jules Van Praet¹²⁰ on the subject. Barrot considered the paper to be a weapon manufactured in Belgium against two friendly countries and consequently he demanded that *L'Étoile du Nord* be prohibited¹²¹. These friendly countries would have the right to demand satisfaction for Belgium's misplaced tolerance. Vilain could only reply that Barrot was correct but that it was impossible for him to act, except to convene the chief editors of the Brussels papers to implore them not to create further problems for the government

112. Jacques Augustin Marie Crétineau-Jolly (1803-75) was a French journalist and historian, chief editor of *L'Étoile du Nord* from 1 July 1855 onwards. **113.** Victor Adolphe Faider (1820-82), solicitor and journalist, brother to Charles Jean-Baptiste Florian Faider (1811-93), minister of Justice (1852-55). **114.** Victor Adolphe Faider (1820-82), solicitor and journalist, brother to Charles Jean-Baptiste Florian Faider (1811-93), minister of Justice (1852-55). **115.** The French agent Barrot thought the Russian legation in Berlin was behind the project, which enabled the Russian legation in Brussels to stay out of sight, see *AGK, Französischer Akten*, Nr. 160 : Barrot to Walewski, 15.6.1855, p. 326. **116.** Charles Augustus Ellis, 6th Baron Howard de Walden (1799-1868), was plenipotentiary minister and extraordinary envoy in Stockholm (1832), Lisbon (1833-46) and Brussels (1846-57). **117.** *AGK, Englischer Akten*, Nr. 504 : Howard de Walden to Clarendon, 22.6.1855, p. 767. **118.** *Idem*, p. 767. **119.** Viscount Charles Vilain XIII (1803-78) was extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister to Rome (1832-33 and 1835-39), delegate (1831-36 and 1839-78) and President of the Chamber (1870-71). He served as Foreign Minister from 1855 to 1857. **120.** Jules Van Praet (1806-87) can be considered the invisible hand behind the convergence of Belgian foreign policy and the King's personal diplomacy, see ERNEST DISCAILLES, "Jules Van Praet", in *Biographie Nationale*, XVIII, p. 154-163 & CARLO BRONNE, *Jules van Praet: ministre de la maison du roi Léopold 1er*, Bruxelles, 1943. **121.** *AGK, Französischer Akten*, Nr. 160 : Barrot to Walewski, 15.6.1855, p. 328 : "...que vous [Vilain XIII] laissez forger en Belgique contre deux puissances amies".

by supporting ‘un-Belgian’ interests. If not, the government would soon be faced with a crucial choice : modifying the constitution or facing the wrath of the Great Powers. In any case, chief editor of *L’Étoile du Nord*, Crétineau-Joly, was expelled on the first publication date of the paper¹²². At the start of July 1855 Leopold was in London to speak to Clarendon about the matter. The King claimed nothing other than his will “to gag it [the press] all if he did but know how”¹²³.

The Times’ readers were reassured by the news that the Belgian army was impatiently waiting to join the allies¹²⁴. *The Morning Post* reported on a possible French campaign in the Rhineland and claimed that France would, in that case, annex Belgium or come to an agreement with it, permitting Belgian troops to participate in the campaign against Prussia¹²⁵. The paper’s speculation tallied with what *L’Émancipation* had reported on 14 February¹²⁶. For the government, the

article in *L’Émancipation* was a signal to reconfirm its intention of respecting Belgian neutrality, De Brouckère did so in parliament and this was repeated by his successor Vilain XIII a few months later¹²⁷. Despite these statements, the writings of the British press continued to cause distress with Belgian public opinion¹²⁸. The indignation was comprehensible as the tirade continued unabated until the end of the war. *The Morning Post* still declared that “by some lucky accident Belgium in the present context has not yet become the battle ground of Europe. How long it may enjoy this immunity is a question”¹²⁹.

Around New Year of 1856 there was still concern in Belgium on the course the conflict would take after the fall of Sebastopol on 1 September 1855. Although Tsar Nicolas I died during the siege (2 March 1855), his successor Alexander II continued the war which could still be brought to western and central Europe. According to the French

122. *Idem*, p. 326-328. 123. AGK, Englischer Akten, Nr. 525: Clarendon to Cowley, 9.7.1855, p. 792-793. 124. AFO, PC-GB, Vandeweyer to de Brouckère, 9.2.1855. *The Morning Chronicle* was another paper announcing Belgium would enter the alliance, see *L’Indépendance belge*, 16.2.1855. 125. AFO, PC-GB, Vandeweyer to Vilain XIII, 9.6.1855. 126. That the propaganda had effect is illustrated by the correspondence of Phillibert Bron of Brussels with his sons, Émile and Auguste, who were serving in the French Foreign Legion in the Crimea. In one of the letters Phillibert Bron stated “il est probable qu’avant peu, un traité d’alliance se fera avec la France et l’Angleterre, et comme le Piémont, on s’attend ici à ce qu’on demande un contingent belge. Vous seriez sauvés car il y aurait un pardon général et l’on ferait rentrer tous ceux qui sont à l’armée pour rejoindre ce corps; c’est le bruit qui court”, see Archives of the Royal Military Museum, *Officers Fund*, Bron, Phillibert Bron to his sons, 11.2.1855. Auguste Bron, born in Brussels in 1833, served in French (from 1853 to 1856) and Dutch service (from 1857); eventually he left for Batavia. The Foreign Legion was actively recruiting in Belgium, see JEAN LORETTE, “Problèmes...”, p. 589. 127. PPCD, 30.11.1855, p. 115. 128. An editor of *L’Émancipation*, in an article of 22 October 1855, stated : “On nous stimule, on nous presse, on nous aiguillonne, on invoque l’initiative et l’exemple d’un autre état, on nous assigne divers rôles, tous plus importants les uns que les autres (...) on nous traite fort durement et l’on nous jette au nez toutes sortes d’adjectifs qu’il est beaucoup moins dangereux d’appliquer aux nations qu’aux individus”. 129. AFO, PC-GB, Vandeweyer to Vilain XIII, 11.10.1855.



The Crimean War was the first modern war that was photographed on a large scale. Roger Fenton was the official war photographer, paid by the British government. The picture above shows a meeting between British officers, the picture below shows Fenton with his mobile photo-studio. (Library of Congress)

chargé d'affaires in Brussels, Lallemand¹³⁰, the desire for peace and fear of the consequences of a prolongation of the war, were strongest among the conservatives in the Belgian parliament. French reluctance could still take a wrong turn as there were French who saw Belgium as the logical bargaining chip within the continental struggle and the promised reward in the case of a French victory¹³¹. Leopold was convinced the war would continue and thought it improbable that Russia would accept the four points proposition of Vienna¹³². His pessimism increased further after Austria joined the allies in December 1855 because, if Austria and Russia clashed and the latter would pursue the former on its own territory, Prussia and the German Confederation would interfere to drive back the invader. War could even last until 1857¹³³. Leopold showed aware-

ness of the changing power constellations in Europe; he urged the Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Buol¹³⁴, to reactivate the conference system in order to prevent the outbreak of future wars. Still, he held on to his plea for a conference with the five Great Powers¹³⁵.

The year-long correspondence between Leopold and the French statesman Thiers¹³⁶, which began before the Turkish-Egyptian War of 1840, also sheds light on the King's ideas at that time. As he had done during the 1840 crisis, he pleaded for the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Important for the future was to safeguard the relations between the powers which would benefit from respecting the integrity of the empire and this, of course, would arise from a treaty¹³⁷. Leopold proposed a treaty which would end, albeit

130. Count Marie Charles Henri Albert de Lallemand (1822-82) was secretary and *chargé d'affaires* in Dresden (1851-55) and Brussels (1855-57) and temporary *chargé d'affaires* in Constantinople (1858, 1860-61). **131.** AGK, Französischer Akten, Nr. 317 : Lallemand to Walewski, 28.12.1855, p. 623 : "...l'enjeu naturel d'une lutte continentale que la France entreprendra et le prix promis à ses efforts et à sa victoire le cas échéant". **132.** On 7 January 1855, Nicolas I had agreed to start negotiations based on the four points of Vienna. These were signed by the Great Powers as a condition for an allied stand off : Russia would have to abandon the Danube principalities and also its claim on an Orthodox Christian protectorate in the Balkans; the Danube principalities and Serbia would become autonomous under international, rather than Russian, guarantee; free shipping on the Danube would have to be confirmed by international agreement and the 1841 Straits Convention would have to be revised. When Russia refused these demands, Britain and France decided to engage in military action in the Crimea. **133.** AGK, Französischer Akten, Nr. 332 : Barrot to Walewski, 8.1.1856, p. 653. **134.** Count Karl Ferdinand von Buol-Schauenstein (1797-1865) was resident minister in Baden and Hessen (1828-38), Württemberg (1838-44), Piedmont (1844-48), Russia (1848-50), Dresden (1850-51) and London (1851-52), before becoming Foreign Minister (1852-59). **135.** AGK, Osterreichischer Akten, Munich-Vienna, 1979-1980, Nr. 191 : Leopold I to Buol, 2.2.1856, p. 333-334. **136.** Louis Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877) occupied several ministerial postings. From 1832 to 1836 these were the Interior, Public Works and Foreign Affairs. In 1840 he became Foreign Minister again. He was a delegate from 1830 to 1877 and also the first president of the Third Republic (1871-73). **137.** LÉON DE LANZAC DE LABORIE, *Correspondance du siècle dernier. Un projet de mariage du duc d'Orléans (1836). Lettres de Léopold I de Belgique à Adolphe Thiers (1836-1864)*, Paris, 1918, p. 321 : Leopold I to Thiers, 10.4.1855 : "...un lien entre les puissances les plus intéressées à sauvegarder l'avenir du territoire maintenant en possession de la Porte, et cela ne pourrait être qu'un traité".

temporarily, the problems but would create a real bond between the great maritime powers and those willing to join¹³⁸. As we have seen before, the King was reluctant to agree to a severe punishment of Russia. Late in 1855 he thought it best to end the suffering with an immediate cease-fire and negotiations, rather than to wait for Russia to glide further down. For Palmerston, this attitude was typical of smaller continental states, to which France was always a menace, Russia a natural support and Turkey's existence a matter of total indifference. These countries did not want to weaken the power to which they would one day turn. "Leopold's logic is not striking", Palmerston wrote to Clarendon on 3 December 1855¹³⁹.

In November 1855, Napoleon urged the Belgian government to support appeasing initiatives in Saint-Petersburg. Napoleon wanted neutral states to use their influence to force the Russian cabinet to accept concessions. In Brussels, Barrot suggested the Emperor's

invitation be taken seriously and expected Belgium to express its engagement by publicly condemning Russia's attitude¹⁴⁰. Though Vilain expressed his objections, the government accepted the invitation. To act in favour of peace would not be in conflict with neutrality. Steps were taken towards the Russian government although there is no trace of any public statement¹⁴¹. There were also meetings between Vilain, Chreptovitsj and von Grote, the first secretary of the Russian legation in Brussels, about adopting a conciliatory attitude¹⁴². According to Vilain, the Russian legation's tone changed and it became receptive to the minister's arguments¹⁴³.

Despite the war being near to its conclusion, it remained a delicate matter. In Paris, Firmin Rogier abstained from attending a *Te Deum*, organised to commemorate a French victory in the Crimea, in accordance with his instructions. Count Walewski reacted badly to this absence,

138. *Idem*, "...un traité de ce genre serait un lien réel entre les deux grandes puissances maritimes et celles des autres qui voudraient les (sic) joindre. La Porte va sortir de tous les soins qu'on lui donne dans un état assez chétif. Il est impossible de se cacher cela. S'en occuper deviendra indispensable", see *idem*. Six months later he was full of praise for the French army which had stormed the Malakoff-hill and taken Sebastopol; he predicted a magnificent outcome for France, see *idem*, 8.10.1855. On 27 February 1856 he sent an analysis of Russia's actions to Thiers. Russia had not wanted a great war; by a show of strength it had hoped to obtain an advantageous position to exert influence on the Sultan. Leopold called the Tsar an "enfant gâté de la fortune". As for Turkey, it was doomed, "vivant dans une confusion chronique qui pouvait durer longtemps, sa soi-disant réorganisation doit nécessairement la tuer". **139.** AGK, Englischer Akten, Nr. 230 : Palmerston to Clarendon, 3.12.1855, p. 437. **140.** AGK, Französischer Akten, Nr. 278 : Barrot to Walewski, 28.11.1855, p. 548 : "de manière à être entendue de tout le monde". Barrot added : "l'Empereur ne vous demande pas autre chose". **141.** The political correspondence of the Saint-Petersburg legation from November 1855 to February 1856 in the AFO is badly damaged, which makes digging deeper impossible. What we do have are letters from the temporary *chargé d'affaires* Desmazières to Vilain XIII on the Belgian presence at religious ceremonies, after there was an abstention for the duration of the war, see AFO, PC-R, Vilain XIII to Desmazières, 25.10.1855. **142.** Alfred von Grote (1823-95) was first secretary from 1853 to 1857. **143.** AGK, Französischer Akten, Nr. 317 : Lallemand to Walewski, 28.12.1855, p. 623.

insulting Rogier and demanding not to see this repeated¹⁴⁴.

V. The problem of Belgian arms exports

In this penultimate chapter the chronological narrative on neutrality will be temporarily abandoned to focus on the Belgian arms exports, which will be used to further analyse Belgian neutrality during the Crimean crisis.

The Liège arms industry and its exports was an early success story in the economics of the Southern Netherlands and its successor, Belgium. Arms, hunting and military weapons, artillery and ammunition played a substantial part in Belgian exports¹⁴⁵. However, by the time of the Crimean War, this economic success story angered the allies, especially Britain and France. Prior to the formal declaration of war, the Belgian government was already under behind-the-scenes pressure to control its arms exports. In February 1854, Drouyn de Lhuys was informed of a Russian order for 50,000 rifles of the latest types placed in Liège. A Russian general had been sent to the factories and part of the order,

between 8,000 to 10,000 pieces, was waiting in an Antwerp warehouse to be transported to Danzig (Gdansk). Drouyn asked the French ambassador in Brussels to draw the Belgian government's attention to the stipulations of maritime law, which prohibited arms transport by a neutral party for the benefit of a belligerent power. Ships violating this stipulation could be intercepted, their loads seized and the ships themselves confiscated¹⁴⁶. The Belgian government however stuck to its position that that international law did not prohibit selling arms to warring nations which would be its point of view until the end of the crisis. Selling was permitted, transporting was not. For Belgium, weapons and ammunition only became contraband ("*contrebande de guerre*") when they left the country by sea¹⁴⁷. Of course, this distinction was artificial. Drouyn argued the Belgian government had to adopt the same attitude as the Danish and Swedes who forbade belligerents from provisioning in their ports¹⁴⁸. In March, Barrot questioned de Brouckère, who had previously also been interrogated by Howard de Walden. The latter obtained rights for the consuls of the Great Powers to demand information on arms deals, though this turned out to be anything but straightforward. The British consul in Antwerp

144. ÉMILE BANNING, *Les origines...*, p. 104. **145.** See JAN ANCKAER, *Small power...*, chapter 8. The confidential character of the arms export branch meant that official figures were not very reliable, especially in times of severe international crises, when the true nature of certain cargos would have to be concealed. The products of the arms industry were diversified. In Liège rifle types as '*le Mahomet*' and '*le Janissaire*' were specifically produced for the Ottoman market; cannon, iron camp beds, hand guns, weapon parts (barrels), carbines and luxury and decorated weapons were also exported. The Ottoman army reforms gave a new impetus to the old arms trade between Liège and the empire. The reasons for the global success of the arms industry was its competitive price, compared to French and British manufacturers, which could also guarantee similar quality. On top of this came the Liège manufacturers' capacity to adapt to the market. For the Liège arms industry see CLAUDE GAIER, *Cinq siècles d'armurerie liégeoise*, Allieur, 1996. **146.** An anonymous source confirmed this in *L'Indépendance belge*, 20.3.1854. **147.** AD, PC-B, Nr. 35 : memo on the Belgian arms export to Russia. **148.** AGK, Französischer Akten, Nr. 407 : Drouyn to Barrot, 25.2.1854, p. 886-887.



Painting of the participants to the Paris conference, where the conditions for the end of the Crimean War were determined. The most important negotiators were (sitting in the foreground) prince Aleksey Fyodorovitch Orloff for Russia, Alexandre Colonna-Walewski for France, the Earl of Clarendon for the United Kingdom and Mehmed Pasha for the Ottoman Empire. (Artist Edouard-Louis Dubufe, Palais de Versailles)

complained he did not receive any reply to his queries¹⁴⁹. Barrot found it unacceptable that Belgium provided arms to Russia, a nation which had only recently, in May 1853, acknowledged Belgium's existence and which was the enemy of the nations responsible for its own genesis. De Brouckère refused to go into the matter; he only declared that Belgium exported to all parties, even to the Ottomans who had delegated two officers to follow up on their orders¹⁵⁰. The statistics on Belgian arms exports during the first two months of 1854 show the allies received seven times more arms than Russia in the same period¹⁵¹.

Prohibiting export was out of the question because the consequences would be catastrophic for the whole province of Liège. Between 8,000 to 10,000 workers would become unemployed which, together with the Liège population's revolutionary reputation, was a potentially explosive mixture. De

Brouckère admitted that neutrality could be invoked for weapons produced by the royal factories (the *Fonderie Royale de Canons*, the *Fabrique d'Armes de Guerre* and the *Établissement Pyrotechnique*), but not for the products of private enterprises¹⁵². The difference between the neutrality Denmark and Sweden called upon was manifest. These countries had an *ad hoc* approach to neutrality while, for Belgium, neutrality was a condition of existence. It was unacceptable if this same neutrality became a cause of ruin for Belgium¹⁵³. Barrot thought it justified to ask Belgium not to profit from the misfortune of two of its best friends¹⁵⁴. The closure of its factories was not demanded, just a ban on exporting to France and Britain's enemies. Simultaneously, Howard de Walden asked the government to suspend all arms exports until further notice, unless a special licence was provided confirming that the recipient of the goods was a non-belligerent nation. If Belgium refused to

149. NA, FO 10/181 : Howard de Walden to Clarendon, 14.3.1854. **150.** In the summer of 1853, the Liège arms manufacturer *Falisse & Trapmann* met with the Ottoman secretary in Brussels, Glavany, about an order of 40,000 to 50,000 rifles. Because "*les rapports que votre gouvernement a eu avec la Belgique pour d'autres commandes n'ont pas été heureux*", Glavany was offered advice on the procedure, see BOA, HR/SFR, 4/2-2 : Falisse & Trapmann to Glavany, 2.8.1853. **151.** JEAN LORETTE, "Problèmes...", p. 588 (note 6) and DANIEL THOMAS, *The guarantee...*, p. 131. Even the official figures of arms exports to the Ottoman Empire illustrate that the Crimean War was a period of expansion, apart from 1855 when the allies' restrictive measures may have had a temporary result, see JAN ANCKAER, *Small power...*, chart VIII. **152.** For the foundry in the Liège quarter of Saint-Léonard already active in the French period, hardly any export figures are available. From 1831 to 1839, the factory provided only for the Belgian army. Due to overcapacity, between 1840 and 1860, foreign governments were also among its clients. According to an 1859 consular report, some 3,345 pieces of artillery were delivered to foreign nations, including Turkey and Egypt, see JACQUES HERLIANT, "De Fonderie Royale de Canons, industrielle pijler voor de uitrusting van de Belgische defensie tussen 1830 en 1870. Historische en technologische analyse", in *Belgische bijdragen tot de militaire geschiedenis*, Nr. 3, 3.2005, p. 173. For the history of the foundry, see ALAIN DESCY, *Livre mémorial 1803-2003. Deux siècles de la Fonderie de canons de Liège*, Liège, 2003. **153.** AGK, Französischer Akten, Nr. 422 : Barrot to Drouyn, 7.3.1854, p. 920. A Howard de Walden message confirmed the French-British consensus, see NA, FO 10/180 : Howard de Walden to Clarendon, 7.3.1854. **154.** AGK, Französischer Akten, Nr. 422 : Barrot to Drouyn, 7.3.1854, p. 921 : "...nous croyons pouvoir vous demander de ne pas profiter, pour vous enrichir, des malheurs auxquels se soumettent... deux puissances qui sont le plus sincèrement vos amis".

respect this for “petty industrial advantages”, an Anglo-French reaction was inevitable, it added menacingly¹⁵⁵. As a reaction the government ordered state factories to stop exports of weapons to Russia; through the provincial governor of Liège, it intended to inform manufacturers that arms deals with warring parties would be closely scrutinized from now on¹⁵⁶. Drouyn de Lhuys was not impressed and demanded that Barrot address a formal letter to de Brouckère in which the matter of the private factories would be raised with no concessions¹⁵⁷. Howard de Walden would do the same. Indeed, the British and the French prepared a joint declaration on their attitude towards shipping of neutral nations. This would result in a licence system, obliging ships to apply for a permit with the allies, in order to transport goods destined for Russia. Russian ships, as well as those which were owned in neutral countries, could be confiscated¹⁵⁸.

As Barrot made no progress with de Brouckère, he addressed the King. A meeting with Van Praet, however, made it clear that, because of the upcoming elections scheduled for June 1854, Belgium was not planning to change its position. It was not the right time to compromise the interests of several industrial groupings. Barrot decided to change his strategy. He suggested to his minister that as Belgium exported an important quantity of arms to Turkey (recently 25,000 rifles and 200 Paixhans canon from Liège), that France might be able to take over this sort of order¹⁵⁹. That way the Belgian argument that it was providing all nations would lose force. The British adopted a similar approach in trying to slow down Belgian arms production and exports. At the end of 1854 the British government ordered 20,000 Minié rifles from a temporary venture consisting of the Liège manufacturers *Auguste Francotte, Ancion & Cie, Renkin frères* and *Pirlot frères*¹⁶⁰. Never before had Britain

155. NA, FO 10/180 : Howard de Walden to de Brouckère, 10.3.1854. **156.** AFO, PC-F (supplements) : de Brouckère to Rogier, 17.3.1854; de Brouckère to Rogier and Vandeweyer, 20.3.1854; Rogier to de Brouckère, 21.3.1854. **157.** AGK, Französischer Akten, Nr. 440 : Drouyn to Walewski, 20.3.1854, p. 960; DA, PC-B, Nr. 35 : Drouyn to Barrot, 21.3.1854. **158.** State Archives Beveren, *Chamber of Commerce Sint-Niklaas*, Nr. 10 : governor to the Chamber, 15 May and 3.7.1854. **159.** From the French General Henri Joseph Paixhans (1783-1854), responsible for the development of a hollow large caliber cannon ball. The correspondence of Eugène de Kerckhove, the Ottoman minister in Brussels, confirms he had contact with several Liège factories including Pastor in Seraing amongst others, see Family Archives de Kerckhove, ‘*Carnets de correspondance*’ of Eugène de Kerckhove, letters of 21.9., 1.11.1855 and 15.2.1856. All the time he was also in contact with Colonel Frédéricckx, the director of the *Fonderie Royale de Canons* in Liège, see *idem*, de Kerckhove to Frédéricckx, 31.7.1854, 11.1., 28.2. & 17.6.1856, 7.3., 1.4., 24.7. & 7.8.1857. At the start of 1856, the Ottoman *serasker* Mehmed Rushdi received a Belgian decoration in recognition of the arms orders. Vilain XIII initially objected to the decoration on the grounds of it being a violation of Belgian neutrality, but he gave in when the Porte insisted, see BOA, HR/SFR-4/2-322 : de Kerckhove to Fuad Pasja, 12.1.1856. **160.** The venture did not survive the end of the war, despite another order in 1855, see AFO, PC-GB, Vandeweyer to Vilain XIII, 7.5.1855. Minié rifles were developed from around 1850 after the invention of the Minié bullets, named after the French captain involved in their design. The rifle permitted faster reloading and it had a long range (550 m. accuracy). During the Crimean War they were already used on a limited scale to become generally used during the American Civil War.



While the cannons are silent, the soldiers can take a short break. Although Belgium did not play any significant role during the Crimean War in a political or diplomatic sense, the country played an essential role in the production and supply of arms. Belgium supplied all belligerents with cannons and lighter arms, thereby putting its position of mandatory neutrality in danger. (Photo by Roger Fenton, Library of Congress)

ordered military armaments from Belgium and now there were so many orders that, according to de Brouckère, the manufacturers even had problems in meeting the demand¹⁶¹. In normal conditions, such an order would permit almost a whole year of full employment in the arms factories¹⁶². That this had been a deliberate move from the British to reduce, or slow down, the processing of Russian orders was confirmed by Lord Seymour in the Crimean War parliamentary research commission in Westminster some months later¹⁶³. The French were aware of this strategy but disliked it as, without the British orders, the allied demands would have been more convincing. Now they sounded rather hollow. Barrot tried to sooth de Brouckère by advising him not to see the orders as a negation of a former attitude of the allies, but rather as an attempt to minimize the consequences of the Belgian refusal¹⁶⁴. Though it had been intended to hinder Russian orders, the plan failed as the former orders received precedence¹⁶⁵. Indeed, the

large part of the war orders had probably been sent out already.

Another concerned party was Prussia, which suffered because it was gateway, by train via Cologne or ship through the Baltic Sea, to Russia. Prussia was highly dissatisfied that its territory was being used as a transit zone for Belgian arms and this was enhanced by the allies' criticism. Manteuffel¹⁶⁶ upheld that Prussian law did not permit illegitimate transit trade but on 20 March 1854 King Friedrich Wilhelm instituted a temporary ban¹⁶⁷. Only the sea route would remain open and Barrot and Howard proposed to have it secured by cruisers to their ministers¹⁶⁸. In Brussels, de Brouckère complained to the Prussian envoy about the transfer ban which could cause severe damage to the Liège arms industry although a decrease in Franco-British pressure might now be expected¹⁶⁹. On 24 March 1854, a cargo of Liège Minié rifles, on its way through Cologne to the Russian border,

161. AFO, *PC-P*, de Brouckère to Nothomb, 11.12.1854 : "...que tous les armuriers sont occupés et ne peuvent que difficilement suffire à la besogne". **162.** AFO, *Political files*, Nr. 2303 I, de Macar to de Brouckère, 16.12.1854. **163.** AFO, *PC-GB*, Vandeweyer to Vilain XIII, 7.5.1855. A study of a year later confirmed this. Lord Edward Adolphus Seymour (1805-55) was a Whig politician, an MP from 1830 onwards, who occupied several ministerial posts under Melbourne (1835-41) and Russell (1851). He was also First Lord of the Admiralty (1859-63); in 1855 he became the 12th Duke of Somerset. **164.** AFO, *PC-GB*, Vandeweyer to Vilain XIII, 7.5.1855. A study of a year later confirmed this. Lord Edward Adolphus Seymour (1805-55) was a Whig politician, an MP from 1830 onwards, who occupied several ministerial posts under Melbourne (1835-41) and Russell (1851). He was also First Lord of the Admiralty (1859-63); in 1855 he became the 12th Duke of Somerset. **165.** AFO, *PC-GB*, Vandeweyer to Vilain XIII, 16.5.1855. **166.** Otto Theodor von Manteuffel (1805-82) was Prussian Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs minister from 1850 to 1858. **167.** AGK, *Preussischer Akten*, Nr. 221 : Heydt to Manteuffel, 16.3.1854, p. 512-513 & AGK, *Englischer Akten*, Nr. 414 : Memorandum respecting the Export of Arms and Munitions of War from Prussia to Russia during the Crimean War, 1.1856, p. 703. For background to the arms shipments to Russia through Prussia, see also LADEMACHER, *Die belgische Neutralität...*, p. 169-177. **168.** AGK, *Französischer Akten*, Nr. 443 : Barrot to Drouyn, 23.3.1854, p. 969 and DA, *PC-B*, Nr. 35 : Drouyn to Barrot, 10.4.1854. **169.** GStA PK, *I HA Rep.* 81 Brüssel : Brockhausen to Friedrich Wilhelm IV, 23.3.1854. By some curious reasoning the Prussians also thought they could acquire orders placed in Belgium, especially after the transit ban as Belgian arms would become more expensive when shipping was the only way to transport them, see AGK, *Preussischer Akten*, Nr. 241 : Münster to Gerlach, 30.3.1854, p. 560-563.

was intercepted in Bromberg (Bydgoszcz) by order of the government leader of the Prussian province of North Posen (Poznan) who had been approached by the British and French ambassadors in Berlin. Despite the transit ban, the regional leader was overruled by the Prussian Foreign Minister who ordered an immediate release of the cargo. According to Nothomb in Berlin, the British had wanted to acquire the seized cargo by paying more for it but they had been too late because a Russian agent was sent to Bromberg to collect the goods¹⁷⁰. A month later, a further 10,000 rifles were transported from Liège to the Russian border¹⁷¹. Clearly, there was confusion on the range and signification of the ban. In the following weeks several more transports left Antwerp for Bremerhaven, Oldenburg and Hamburg. The reports of the French consul-general in the Hansa ports confirmed that a transit ban was anything but visible¹⁷².

A more determined Franco-British reaction now followed. Howard de Walden and Barrot started to pressurise de Brouckère. Drouyn instructed Barrot to do anything to instil the Belgian cabinet with a better

appreciation of its obligations in the current circumstances¹⁷³. Belgium should not forget what it owed to France and Britain; “a friendly disposition” was all Drouyn wished for. In spite of repeated guarantees by de Brouckère, Drouyn had information which confirmed that Belgian industry was running on a scale which was disproportionate with the regular trade necessities¹⁷⁴. In the eyes of Howard de Walden, Belgium was disqualified because it had let commercial considerations stand above the problems confronting Europe¹⁷⁵.

On 11 April 1854, de Brouckère announced new measures. The tollbooths in the Antwerp and Ostend harbours received instructions to be more vigilant; from now on Barrot would be informed of any Belgian arms deals with Russia; and the manufacturers would be warned of the risks of involving themselves in military conflicts¹⁷⁶. Despite pleas from the industry, which feared it might descend into complete stagnation, de Brouckère assured Barrot of the leitmotiv of Belgian neutrality which would henceforth be benevolence and friendship with France¹⁷⁷. Some deliveries to clients involved in or related to the war

170. AFO, *PC-P*, Nothomb to de Brouckère, 21.3.1854; DA, *PC-B*, Nr. 35 : de Macar to de Brouckère (attached to Barrot to Drouyn de Lhuys, 27.1.1855). In February 1855 a British agent in Liège managed to buy a cargo destined for Russia, see *ibid.*, Barrot to Drouyn de Lhuys, 16.2.1855. **171.** AGK, *Englischer Akten*, Nr. 414 : Memorandum respecting the Export of Arms and Munitions of War from Prussia to Russia during the Crimean War, 1.1856, p. 702-703. **172.** DA, *PC-C*, Nr. 2 : Baron de Theiss to Drouyn, 31.3., 2.4. & 8.4.1854. **173.** AGK, *Französischer Akten*, Nr. 24 : Drouyn to Barrot, 12.4.1854, 116. Barrot reported earlier Belgium had violated its imposed neutrality to be able to respect it “*plus rigoureusement que tout autre puissance*”, see DA, *PC-B*, Nr. 35 : Barrot to Drouyn, 10.4.1854. **174.** AGK, *Französischer Akten*, Nr. 24, p. 117. The French naval archives contain numerous letters on the arms deals from the minister of Foreign Affairs to his War colleague, see ALBERT DUCHESNE, *Les archives de la guerre et de la marine à Paris et l'histoire de Belgique*, Bruxelles, 1962, p. 455 (Archives centrales de la Marine, *Fonds Moderne jusqu'en 1870*, subseries BB⁴, Nr. 717 : 7.2.1854 to 21.2.1856). **175.** NA, FO 10/180 : Clarendon to Howard de Walden, 31.3.1854 and Howard de Walden to Clarendon, 8.4.1854. **176.** *Idem*, Nr. 35 : Barrot to Drouyn, 12.4.1854. **177.** GSA, *Chamber of Commerce Liège*, Pirlot frères to the Chamber, 18.4.1854 & DA, *PC-B*, Nr. 35 : Barrot to Drouyn, 12.4.1854.

were temporarily suspended. These were orders from the Egyptian viceroy (end of May 1854) and an important order from the Ottoman Navy of 600 large-calibre canon (March 1854)¹⁷⁸. As could be expected the allies' discontent was not allayed. Drouyn started to think of a general blockade of Belgian industry¹⁷⁹. For the time being, this was out of the question but the effects of the Prussian transit ban were negligible and Prussia now also expanded its own arms production. In August, Clarendon complained to the British ambassador in Berlin the arms transit was almost completely unobstructed in Prussia. He referred to Prussia's attitude as an act of "hostile neutrality"¹⁸⁰. Barrot's reports confirmed the stories and, in August 1854, the French government sent an agent (Chapey) to Liège¹⁸¹. Arms were indeed exported to Prussia - officially destined for local consumption - import duties were paid and the weapons were re-exported to Russia, this time as Prussian arms¹⁸². To Barrot the remedy would be to pursue and confiscate ships leaving Belgian harbours destined for Russia, if necessary by following them as far as their destination¹⁸³. The Antwerp ship-owners were worried and asked the French and British consuls for a certificate with which they could safeguard their ships and cargos. The British

consul refused to provide any for transport to the Hansa cities against which the Liège manufacturers protested vigorously¹⁸⁴. The Dutch government, in the meantime, looked the other way when ships loaded with guns navigated close to shore to elude patrolling cruisers. Perhaps this was a consequence of Holland's dynastic ties with Russia which were also the basis for its refusal to inform the allies of arms exports¹⁸⁵.

Neutrality was a judicial principle upon which the European equilibrium and the existence of Belgium were based; at least that is what de Brouckère declared in parliament in February 1855¹⁸⁶. Although neutrality limited international freedom of action, it offered Belgium the chance to remain aloof during conflicts and even to profit from them. De Brouckère phrased it elegantly: "Let us profit calmly from our neutrality without parading it"¹⁸⁷. That is exactly what Belgium did and arms transports continued unabated. At the end of November 1854, 42 artillery pieces had been transported through Prussia to Russia. At the beginning of December, these were followed by 500 pistols and a cargo with a total value of 500,000 Frs. The British ambassador in Berlin, Bloomfield, confirmed that "the greater quantities have

178. AFO, *PC-T*, Blondeel to de Brouckère, 7 & 27.5.1854. **179.** AGK, *Englischer Akten*, Nr. 246: Clarendon to Stratford, 22.5.1854, p. 411 (memo Drouyn de Lhuys attached to this letter). **180.** *Idem*, Nr. 356: Clarendon to Bloomfield, 22.8.1854, p. 579. **181.** DA, *PC-B*, Nr. 36: Barrot to Drouyn de Lhuys, 17 and 18.8.1854. **182.** AFO, *PC-P*, Nothomb to de Brouckère, 29.11.1854. **183.** DA, *PC-B*, Nr. 36: Mémoire Barrot "Armes françaises par la Belgique à la Russie", s.d. Already in April 1854 a Spanish ship had been intercepted at the mouth of the Scheldt on its way to Plymouth, see *idem*, Nr. 35: Barrot to Drouyn de Lhuys, 10.4.1854. A month later a Greek ship in Malta suffered the same fate, see AFO, *PC-GB*, Vandeweyer to de Brouckère, 10.5.1854. **184.** AFO, *Personnel Files*, Vandeweyer, J. & N. Camarache to de Brouckère, 14.5.1854 (copy). **185.** AFO, *PC-N*, Willmar to de Brouckère, 17 and 28.4.1854. **186.** *PPCD*, 16.2.1855, p. 744-745. **187.** "Profitions tranquillement de notre neutralité sans en faire parade", see ALFRED DE RIDDER, "La neutralité belge...", p. 229.

come from Belgium”¹⁸⁸. After the protests against the Belgian stance, it was Prussia’s time to suffer from the allied reaction. Lord Russell¹⁸⁹ wanted to punish Prussia for its indolent attitude, but also for its own arms exports to Russia¹⁹⁰. As a reprisal, parts of its territory could be given to Belgium (Rhine provinces), Poland (Danzig) and Austria (part of Silesia)¹⁹¹. Furthermore, it became obvious there were accomplices in Prussia who were profiting from trafficking illegal arms. The names of two ministers were cited : the Interior Minister, Otto von Westphalia, and Finance Minister, Karl von Bodenschwing¹⁹². Eventually, under British pressure, Prussia decided to adapt the one-year old transit ban. On 8 March 1855 it declared a general prohibition on the export of all arms and ammunition unaccompanied by a certificate confirming the origin of the goods as one of the factories of the German *Zollverein*¹⁹³. However, the transports simply continued as before¹⁹⁴. According to Howard de Walden, part of the production was transferred to Maastricht where a workshop had been established by Liège manufacturers¹⁹⁵. Barrot complained the transports continued by all means possible; war armaments were sold as

luxury hunting weapons without the necessary documents¹⁹⁶. Evidently, in late 1855, it had become extremely difficult to obtain a permit from London or Paris for the export of war material but, according to Vilain XVIII, this had not affected the number of demands¹⁹⁷.

Inventiveness in exploiting the commercial possibilities offered by the Crimean War was also illustrated by Russian recruitment of skilled workers from the Liège industrial sites, in April 1855, to produce weapons in Russia¹⁹⁸. As Belgium tried to profit from all sides, it was also concerned in projects which were advantageous to the allies. In January 1856, the Prussian consul-general in London reported that the British government exported saltpetre, through a London trading company based in the United States, to Belgium and Prussia to be transformed to powder and re-exported to Britain. In view of British objections to Prussian ammunition export to Russia, this was not without significance.

Arms were also delivered to the Walachian government, in full crisis and by the Belgian consul in Bucharest himself. He assured Vilain XVIII this was a private affair between him, as a

188. AGK, Englischer Akten, Nr. 183 : Bloomfield to Clarendon, 17.2.1855, p. 337.

189. Amongst other positions, Lord John Russell (1792-1878) was Prime Minister (1846-52 and 1865-66), Foreign Minister (1852-53 and 1859-65). **190.** For the Prussian transports, see AGK, Englischer Akten, Nr. 414 : Memorandum respecting the Export of Arms and Munitions of War from Prussia to Russia during the Crimean War, 1.1856, p. 706-707. **191.** *Idem*, Nr. 218 : Russell to Clarendon, 5.3.1855, p. 395-396. **192.** *Idem*, Nr. 218 : Russell to Clarendon, 5.3.1855, p. 395-396. **193.** *Idem*, Nr. 218 : Russell to Clarendon, 5.3.1855, p. 395-396. **194.** AGK, Englischer Akten, Nr. 127 : Bligh to Clarendon, 27.10.1855, p. 259 & Nr. 414 : Memorandum respecting the Export of Arms and Munitions of War from Prussia to Russia during the Crimean War, 1.1856, p. 705 : in April 1855 forty crates of Belgian muskets were exported through Berlin to Russia; in July and August it was gunpowder. In January 1856 this was confirmed by the French vice-consul in Liège, see DA, PC-B, Nr. 40 : Barrot to Walewski, 6.1.1856. **195.** DA, PC-B, Nr. 38 : Barrot to Drouyn de Lhuys, 28.4.1855. **196.** *Idem*, Nr. 39 : Barrot to Walewski, 10.12.1855. **197.** *Idem*, Nr. 39 : Barrot to Walewski, 10.12.1855.

198. AGK, Englischer Akten, Nr. 314 : Bloomfield to Clarendon, 13.4.1855, p. 543-545.

merchant, and the Walachian government. He also claimed to have explicitly communicated this to Prince Barbu Stirbey (1796-1869) and his government¹⁹⁹. In a letter of 30 January 1856, Blondeel announced the reorganisation of the Walachian militia in which Liège arms orders would be part²⁰⁰. The Prince's aide de camp came to Belgium and the order was made through the Ottoman legation in Brussels²⁰¹. Blondeel also reported that the old *kaimakam* (governor) Theodore Balsch (1790-1857) had written him just before he died to thank Blondeel for the support he had given to arms orders²⁰². Indeed, it also seems the Walachian market was well covered by Belgian-produced weapons.

VI. The Paris Treaty and afterwards

In January 1856 there were plans to organise the coming peace negotiations in Brussels. Napoleon was in favour as the Belgian capital was as close to Paris as it was to London. According to the Emperor, Leopold's presence might also be useful to settle certain discussion points²⁰³. Clarendon, however, disapproved

and wrote to Wellesley, the British minister in Brussels, that he could not argue that “the notion of old Leopold having a finger in the pie makes me think less of the objections to that place [Brussels]”²⁰⁴. Nevertheless, the fact that a Belgian city was considered probably indicated growth both in the prestige of the state and in recognition of its neutral position²⁰⁵.

With Prussian arbitration obtained by Leopold, Alexander II signed a peace protocol in Vienna on 1 February 1856, based on the aforementioned four points²⁰⁶. Leopold offered to express the Prussian point of view in Paris and London²⁰⁷. The Prussian reaction is not clear but it seems Leopold had already played all his cards; even his nephew, Prince-Consort Albert, with whom he had a warm relationship, mockingly mentioned “Uncle Leopold”, who “now appears as an advocate for Prussia”²⁰⁸. A few weeks later, the Paris Treaty of 30 March 1856 formally ended the war. The treaty was extensive and focussed on the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, guaranteed by the powers and signatories Britain, France, Russia, Austria, Prussia and

199. AFO, *Personnel Files*, Bucharest, Poumay to Vilain XIII, 1.5.1856. **200.** *Idem*, Blondeel, Blondeel to Vilain XIII, 30.1.1856. **201.** BOA, *HR/SFR-4/2-325* : Stirbey to de Kerckhove, 15.5.1856. Negotiations conducted by the Prince with a German company concerning the construction of a railway between Orsova and Bucharest, through Craiova and with an extension to a Danube port, offered, according to Poumay, fresh perspectives for Belgian construction workshops, see AFO, *Personnel Files*, Blondeel, Poumay to Blondeel, 15 and 27.3.1856. **202.** BOA, *HR/SFR-4/2-325* : Stirbey to de Kerckhove, 15.5.1856. Negotiations conducted by the Prince with a German company concerning the construction of a railway between Orsova and Bucharest, through Craiova and with an extension to a Danube port, offered, according to Poumay, fresh perspectives for Belgian construction workshops, see AFO, *Personnel Files*, Blondeel, Poumay to Blondeel, 15 and 27.3.1856. **203.** NA, *FO 27/1122* : Cowley to Clarendon, 17.1.1856. **204.** NA, *FO 27/1122* : Cowley to Clarendon, 17.1.1856. **205.** DANIEL THOMAS, *The guarantee...*, p. 138. **206.** GSA, *Private Archives Vandeweyer*, Nr. 122 : Vandeweyer to Leopold I, 4.2.1856. **207.** This appears from a report from the Prussian envoy in Brussels, Brockhausen, to von Manteuffel, see GStA PK, *I HA Rep 81*, *Gesandtschaft Brüssel*. **208.** “Onkel Leopold... jetzt als Advokat für Preussen auftritt”, see *AGK*, *Englischer Akten*, Nr. 450 : Memorandum Albert, 18.2.1856, p. 763.

Piedmont-Sardinia. Civil equality and equality of religion for all subjects of the empire; autonomy, under Ottoman sovereignty, for Moldavia, Walachia and Serbia; free shipping on the Danube and neutralisation of the Black Sea were all also guaranteed.

During the Paris talks, Walewski referred to the excessive freedom of press in Belgium. Clarendon, however, held fast to the diplomatic principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other nations. Eventually, the matter was restricted to a mention to the report of the 22nd session of the congress in which the powers deplored the excesses of the Belgian press. Although Belgian public opinion reacted negatively to Walewski's words, the government withheld from commenting. This provoked questions from Auguste Orts in the meeting of the Chamber of 7 May 1856²⁰⁹. Vilain XIII reassuringly declared that not a single foreign nation had demanded that the government change the constitution. If this happened, it would never be tolerated

by the government²¹⁰. From statements made by other participants at the conference, it becomes clear that it was indeed Walewski's goal to convince Leopold to modify the constitution. This was a wish felt by all major powers²¹¹. In any case, one month after the treaty, France deemed the pressure it exercised on Belgium to be sufficient. For now, Paris was satisfied but behind the scene the discussions and complaints on the role of the Belgian press continued. During a ministerial council Leopold again pressed for these complaints to be taken seriously²¹². To Barrot he admitted the complaints were a serious danger for Belgium as they threatened relations with France²¹³. While there was also British pressure, Clarendon did not go as far as his French counterpart Walewski. Clarendon found it a delicate affair, though that was indeed in the interest of the freedom of press to stop "people who advocate assassination as the proper means of securing their political objectives"²¹⁴. For Leopold, peace came just in time to prevent more serious problems

209. *PPCD*, 7.5.1856, pp. 1351-1353. **210.** Baron EUGÈNE-NAPOLÉON BEYENS, *Le Second Empire vu par la diplomatie belge*, Bruges/Paris, s.d., p. 131-132. **211.** *AGK*, Österreichischer Akten, Nr. 340 : Buol/Hübner to Franz Jozef I, 9.4.1856, p. 588. **212.** Leopold had always been very sceptical of the activities of the press, see f. ex. his views expressed early on, prior to the declaration of war, on the excesses of the English press : "...ce qui s'est passé en Angleterre depuis le mois de janvier a dû influencer notre politique; nous ne pouvions pas tolérer d'être représentés comme un obstacle à la politique anglaise. Les feuilles radicales ont été plus loin : elles ont recommandé de donner la Belgique à la France. Dans les pays où la presse égare l'opinion, il faut s'attendre aux plus grandes folies", see *AFO*, *PC-P*, Leopold I to Nothomb, 18.2.1854. **213.** *AGK*, Französischer Akten, Nr. 443, Barrot to Walewski, 30.4.1856, p. 833. **214.** *AGK*, English Akten, Clarendon to Palmerston, 9.4.1856, p. 978. Apart from the problems with the press, Belgium was also the centre of publication of pamphlets which were causing international displeasure. French refugees were often responsible, sometimes inspired and financed by Russia. De Brouckère tried to obtain the promise that the Russians would stop patronising these writings from the Russian minister in Brussels, see *AFO*, *PC-R*, de Brouckère to Chreptovitsj, 10.11.1855. For the cabinet the most annoying pamphlet, entitled *De la conduite de la guerre d'Orient – Expédition de Crimée – Mémoire adressé au gouvernement de S.M. l'Empereur Napoléon III par un officier général* (Brussels, 1855), contained serious criticism of the allies' actions. A French complaint against the editors followed but Belgian justice saw insufficient grounds to proceed, see *MB*, 5 and 15.4.1855, p. 1092 and 1159. The pamphlet was the work of a French political refugee, Tavernier, who also owned *L'Observateur*, and from

for his country and possibly also to prevent its entry into the war. At least that is what he communicated to Queen Victoria. The Great Powers could afford to respect neutrality if and when a sufficient number were not at war amongst themselves. A general war in 1856 however, would have been different. Should Belgium announce its neutrality in this scenario, France would “certainly try to occupy us...”²¹⁵. If Britain, France and Austria had become aligned against Russia and Prussia, France would not look passively on its own security. Instead the French would look for another way than an expedition across the German border and would expect compensation as well. “Rather than become the object ourselves”, Leopold concluded, “we should have no choice but to go with France against Prussia”²¹⁶. Victoria found this exaggerated and saw no possibility or eventuality for Belgium being obliged to break its neutrality. “I cannot at all see how you could even entertain the question for as I just said the basis of the existence of Belgium is her neutrality”, she concluded²¹⁷.

It was Leopold who, after the Crimean War, approached Clarendon with an official proposal to form a Belgian volunteer corps of 12,000 for the East India Company, which had its hands full with repressing the Great Indian Mutiny of January 1857-July 1858. The King also asked his son to study such a project seriously. British guarantees would have to be given, but the potential advantages were clear. Mainly it could serve to maintain “*l’esprit guerre*”, as officers would be given battle experience. To that end the Duke of Brabant’s confident Brialmont²¹⁸ was sent to London. The Belgian proposal, “a dead secret as it has only passed between Leopold and the Queen”, was appreciated, but refused by Prime Minister Palmerston for reasons of national honour²¹⁹. Together with Leopold’s apparent reconciliation with the idea of going to war on France’s side, and combined with his earlier willingness to take over some British colonial obligations, the proposition illustrates the King’s evolution towards a less rigid interpretation of Belgian neutrality.

a Brussels publicist, Charles-Oscar Flor. Encouraged by the success of their first publication, the authors published a second pamphlet a few weeks later under the same pseudonym of ‘De le Court’, see JEAN LORETTE, “Problèmes...”, p. 590. Another critic was the editor of *Sancho. Revue des Hommes et des Choses*, Victor Jolly. The owner of this periodical, A. Tassier Majérus, was a former major in the Free Corps of 1830. Jolly’s *Mensonges et réalités de la guerre d’Orient*, a collection of shorter writings, was a commercial success. Jolly was critical of the allies’ power politics; though he was anti-Turkish, see ARTHUR VERMEERSCH & HELMUT GAUS, *Répertoire de la presse bruxelloise, 1789-1914*, Louvain, 1965-1968. **215.** DANIEL THOMAS, *The guarantee...*, p. 139. **216.** *Idem*, p. 138. **217.** *Ibidem*. **218.** Henri Alexis Brialmont (1821-1903) had a brilliant military career before establishing the periodical *La Belgique militaire* in 1871; later he became a liberal delegate (1892-1904), see PAUL CROKAERT, *Brialmont. Eloge et Mémoires*, Bruxelles, 1925. **219.** ARP, *GA*, Leopold I to the Duke of Brabant, 11 and 25.9.1857 & FREDERICK ARTHUR WELLESLEY, *The Paris Embassy during the Second Empire Selection from the Papers of Henry Richard Wellesley, First Earl Cowley, 1852-1867*, London, 1928, p. 131. See also JEAN & ISABELLE STENGERS, “Rapport sur une mission dans les archives anglaises”, in *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d’Histoire*, CXXI, p. 76 & PAUL CROKAERT, *Brialmont...*, p. 383.

VII. Conclusion

Holding on to neutrality during any period of war is a balancing act. The main agents involved in the case of Belgian neutrality at the time of the Crimean War had different views on the manner in which Belgium should respond. As the conflict proceeded, some of them changed their position, but for the government, including the Foreign Office, moving away from absolute and strict neutrality was never an option – apart from its condoning and protecting the arms exports for domestic reasons. Of those who changed position, Leopold I was the more striking example. When he was confronted, with the European backlash of the Turkish-Egyptian War in 1840, and his kingdom was in danger of being swallowed up by France, his proactive shuttle diplomacy, in itself a violation of Belgian neutrality, contributed to the arrival at a peaceful solution through a five-power treaty. The King's only other concern had been to allow officers of the nascent Belgian army to go to Egypt and Algeria as non-combatants in order to observe and study the ongoing military operations there. More than a decade later, things had changed. Belgium had become a full member of the Concert of Nations, but the international situation had changed from Leopold's Europe of related kings, queens, princes and princesses. As Gita Deneckere showed, Leopold's strategy of a "holy alliance" between the Great Powers which had guaranteed Belgium's existence was no longer paying off. Leopold had lost his grip on events which made him, in the end, reconsider neutrality. However, there were also similarities in the king's approach of both crises: indefatigable diplomacy and

an opportunistic attitude. Leopold's main focus was to keep Belgium out of the war but at the same time profit from the political developments themselves. Even territorial expansion came to be considered an option.

The Crimean War had few consequences for Belgian neutrality in general. Soon afterwards Leopold opposed his government in the matter of the Italian unification and the roles were reversed. The Government was in favour of sending troops which it did, while the King adopted a more prudent attitude. The Crimean War era also gave us a first glimpse of the later Leopold II's ideas on neutrality and territorial expansion. Admittedly, the Crown Prince was inexperienced and his plans were wild, but his interlocutors were prominent and weather-beaten diplomats (Blondeel & O'Sullivan). Combined with later statements on the matter (Greindl), this suggests his plans were more serious than has previously been believed.

In the case of the Belgian arms exports, the government took the position that, because of its international status as a neutral, it was obliged to sell equally to all belligerents. No serious government controls restricted or impeded the sale of armaments. There is no doubt that Belgian neutrality was violated by the arms exports to Russia although the existing treaties were anything but clear on the matter. If they were not a blatant violation of neutrality they were at least offensive to Britain and France, the nations which had guaranteed Belgium's existence. The following years, Belgian industry continued to provide major supplies of weapons. It sold them during the Italian war in 1859; armed Carlists despite complaints from Madrid

and sold arms to revolutionary governments in Hungary, Poland and Germany; finally furnishing weapons to both belligerents in the American Civil War²²⁰. It is clear this was nothing less than an established practice as far as the government and the manufacturers themselves were concerned. It is remarkable how far the government was prepared towards provoking the wrath of the Great Powers.

A focus on little Belgium can offer new insights for the international literature. This

paper contributed to the existing literature on small or neutral powers in such a way as to underline the unique position which Belgium occupied within the European Concert of Nations. At the same time, a comparison with other neutral or 'secondary' states is hardly possible because Belgium's geostrategic and economic importance was greater than that of other neutrals. Consequently, there were several foreign attempts (especially by France), official and non-official, to drag the country into the Crimean War or at least into a proxy war.

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Abbreviations

AD, PC-B	<i>Archives Diplomatiques Paris</i> , Political correspondence-Belgium
AD, PC-C	<i>Archives Diplomatiques Paris</i> , Political correspondence of the consuls
AFO, PC-F	Archives Foreign Office Brussels, Political correspondence-France
AFO, PC-GB	Archives Foreign Office Brussels, Political correspondence-Great-Britain
AFO, PC-N	Archives Foreign Office Brussels, Political correspondence-Netherlands
AFO, PC-P	Archives Foreign Office Brussels, Political correspondence-Prussia
AFO, PC-R	Archives Foreign Office Brussels, Political correspondence-Russia
AFO, PC-RU	Archives Foreign Office Brussels, Political correspondence-Rumania
AFO, PC-T	Archives Foreign Office Brussels, Political correspondence-Turkey
AGK	<i>Akten zur Geschichte des Krimkriegs</i>
ARP, GA	Archives of the Royal Palace, Goffinet Archives
BOA, HR/SFR	<i>Basbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri, Hariciye/Sefaret</i>
GSA	General State Archives Brussels
GStA PK	<i>Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin</i>
MB	<i>Moniteur belge</i>
NA, FO	National Archives Kew, Foreign Office
PPCD	Parliamentary Proceedings Chamber of Delegates
PPS	Parliamentary Proceedings Senate

220. See FRANCIS BALACE, *L'Armurerie Liégeoise et la guerre de sécession, 1861-1865*, Liège, 1978.