

EDITORIAL

- **Bruno De Wever, Chantal Kesteloot & Nico Wouters** -
Chief-Editors

This third English issue of the *Journal of Belgian History* contains four articles dealing with a highly-varied subject matter. We are particularly happy to see two of these articles treating distinctly 19th-century topics.

Vincent Delcorps tackles the challenges that the new era of international alliances post-1944 created for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since its creation, the Ministry had been steeped in a diplomatic and administrative culture of compulsory international neutrality. This policy clearly was no longer relevant after 1944. How adjustment to this new situation should be managed proved far from evident as the ministry tried to redefine itself in a context of fierce international competition with other Belgian departments and powerbrokers. This sheds new light on the internal dynamics of small states trying to re-organize themselves from within, ultimately to find stronger strategic positions in a new geopolitical order.

The article by Jan Anckaer deals with related subject matter, albeit in a time when Belgian neutrality was still a sacrosanct principle for the European balance of power. Nevertheless, the outbreak of the Crimean War (1853-56) put severe strains on Belgian neutrality. This war made the debate on the limits and practical implications of neutrality very acute. The higher economic interests of the Belgian arms exporters clearly contradicted the principal of neutrality but, surprisingly, the great powers had no real answers to curb the problem. The article is particularly interesting however for its re-assessment of the role of King Leopold I and, perhaps even more so, for its analysis of the active role played by the Crown Prince. The future King Leopold II's diplomatic efforts during the Crimean War might even be considered to foreshadow his ideas on Belgian expansionism during his own reign.

The micro case study of Jozefien De Bock about small businesses owned

by immigrants in the city of Ghent between 1960 and 1980 offers a completely different angle and theme. The particular value of the article rests with its critical evaluation of the prism of 'ethnic entrepreneurship' as a one-sided and reductionist way of analysing these immigrants' entrepreneurship. De Bock points out that other elements, including the local social contacts these immigrants developed, played an equally important role.

Finally, the article by Bas de Roo further adds to our publishing portfolio about colonial history. De Roo's analysis of trafficking and smuggling in the Congolese M'Bomu border region does what in-depth case studies should do which is to nuance existing clear-cut assumptions. The article describes a complex social reality in which the Congo Free State authorities silently accepted smuggling and illicit commerce as part of their colonial system of rule, basically because they needed the support of the local elites who were actively engaged in this trafficking.

Traditionally this issue also contains short summaries of recent doctoral research within the field of modern and contemporary Belgian history and a list of previously published reviews (as well as some new full reviews). We regret that the 'Current Issues in Belgian History' section is missing from this issue but we promise to include it again in the December issue of 2015.