

“LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES”

Belgium's Ambiguous Assimilation of Eupen-Malmedy (1919-1940)

- **Vincent O'Connell** -

The inter-war period in Eupen-Malmedy remains a sensitive arena in which the experiences and sensibilities of its inhabitants have barely been broached by historians. The controversial milestones of the interwar period in Eupen-Malmedy have been covered over with the palimpsest of what the late Tony Judt has referred to elsewhere as ‘selective forgetting’ where communities as well as individuals shield certain episodes or events of the past from intrusion by historians¹. The German historian Freddy Cremer describes this phenomenon as akin to ‘amnesia as therapy’. The period following the Nazi invasion and annexation of the former Germany districts in 1940 and their later liberation conspired to further compound an already complex situation. Since then the historical narrative has been shrouded beneath a veil of silence. This article aims in some small way to pull back this veil so that in Cremer’s words “the past may not be left untouched”².

Klaus Pabst's *Eupen Malmedy in der belgischen Regierungs- und Parteienpolitik 1914-1940* published in 1964 has been the traditional starting point for scholars interested in this borderland territory and delineates the political relationship between Eupen-Malmedy and Belgium up to the Nazi annexation of 1940. More recently Bruno Kartheuser has examined the phenomenon of pan-German activity in Eupen-Malmedy in the wake of the period of transition and its later transformation at the hands of Nazi opportunists. His study shows how previously anodyne cultural organisations became transformed into incubators of covert Nazi activity³. Christoph Brüll argues that although Kartheuser demonstrates the degree of enthusiasm and accommodation for Nazi ideas in the districts, he fails to explain why people chose a particular route. He accuses Kartheuser of concentrating instead on making moral judgements and thus losing the nuance between motivations which were either pro-German or pro-Nazi. Martin Schärer's *Deutsche Annexionspolitik im Westen* had previously focused on the annexationist policies of the Third Reich in Eupen Malmedy demonstrating how these proved counter productive to gaining support among the erstwhile pro-German population.

Pieter Lagrou in his work on national memory and recovery in post-Nazi Europe argues that : Awareness of and explicit research into representations of a historical event immediately afterwards, generally helps the historian to avoid the bias implicit in many of his or her sources, and to avoid the pitfalls of partisan accounts or carefully constructed self-serving narratives that might otherwise impose themselves as ready-made interpretations⁴.

In a similar vein, neglecting to focus on the events which precede a particular historical event can also lead to distortions in the historical narrative. This article demonstrates argues that while a myriad of social, political and economic concerns may have helped to play a part in pushing individuals one direction or another, the primary factor which allowed the phenomenon of pro-Nazism to emerge almost unhindered in the wake of the period of transition was the level of disillusionment felt among inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy who having been forced against their will "into the bosom of the Motherland" were eventually betrayed by her and left confused and disillusioned as to which route to take⁵.

1. TONY JUDT, *Postwar. A history of Europe since 1945*, London, 2005, p. 803-831. See also his interview with DONALD A. YERXA, "Postwar. An interview with Tony Judt", in *Historically Speaking*, vii (3), 1-2.2006, <http://www.bu.edu/historic/hs/judt.html>. 2. Freddy Cremer cited in "Freddy Cremer beklagt 'Amnesie als Therapie'", in *Grenz Echo*, 29.9.2010. 3. BRUNO KARTHEUSER, *Les années 30 à Eupen-Malmedy. Regard sur le réseau de la subversion allemande*, Neundorf, 2001. 4. PIETER LAGROU, *The legacy of Nazi occupation. Patriotic memory and national recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 4. 5. CHRISTOPH BRÜLL, "Eupen-Malmedy 1918-1945. Le temps des déchirures", in *Hommage à Henri Bragard (1877-1944)*, – Collection "Mémoire wallonne", 13, Liège, 2009, p. 7-38.

I. 'Into the Belgian Family'

The conditional cession of the German districts of Eupen and Malmedy to Belgium in 1919 fell far short of Belgian expectations at the outset of the peace negotiations in Paris⁶. The eventual outcome saw Belgian hopes of territorial aggrandisement evaporate almost entirely⁷. Apart from the colonial territory of Ruanda-Urundi which was mandated to Belgium by Great Britain in 1920, the two German districts together with Neutral Moresnet were to be the only tangible territorial acquisitions the country would show for its efforts⁸. To some segments of the population inside Belgium gaining Eupen-Malmedy risked inviting trouble as much as securing the borders of the state. So soon after the war and the oppressive German occupation, a tangible distrust among the Belgian populace towards these so called rediscovered brothers (*frères retrouvés*) was evident in press and in parliament⁹. Such suspicions would continue to colour public opinion inside old-Belgium

up to the Nazi-annexation, where this particular territorial gain increasingly came to be seen as a Trojan horse in the eyes of many¹⁰. Any perceived disadvantages were subsumed by concerns for Belgium's future security and the desire for economic recompense, quite apart that is from the palpable appetite for retribution¹¹. This view was best summed up by a number of visiting Belgian parliamentarians in June 1919, just prior to the signing of the Versailles Treaty when they concluded that the general rule of thumb in terms of territorial claims ought to be "the minimum of Germans with the maximum of forest". The welfare of the inhabitants of the region sat far down the menu of considerations¹².

Within these two districts lived two culturally distinct communities which together numbered around 64,000 inhabitants. Whilst Eupen was predominantly ethnic-German in character, Malmedy contained almost 10,000 Walloons who had been subjects of the German Empire for over a century¹³. The majority of

6. A separate piece of legislation regulated the status of the triangular snippet of territory known as Neutral-Moresnet (*Moresnet-Neutre*); *Bibliothèque royale du Royaume de la Belgique* (KBR), *Annales parlementaires*, 1918-1946, M.B.19; *Loi réglant le statut du territoire de Moresnet-neutre*, 15 September 1919, in *Moniteur belge*, 17.10.1919; FIRMIN PAQUET, "Le territoire contesté de Moresnet, dit Moresnet-Neutre", in *Bulletin de la Société verviétoise d'Archéologie et d'Histoire*, XLVII, 1960, p. 53-153. 7. *Archives du Palais royal* (APR), I/981. Hymans was assisted at the Paris Peace Conference by Emile Vandervelde the leader of the Belgian Socialist party, and Jules van den Heuvel who gained a seat on the Reparations Commission (*"La Belgique et la paix"*, 8.3.1920). 8. By *The Treaty of Versailles*, i.22, Belgium was granted a mandate over the former German colony of Ruanda-Urundi. This was confirmed by the League of Nations on 20 July 1922 and reaffirmed on 31 August 1923 (WILLIAM R. LOUIS, "Great Britain and the African peace settlement of 1919", in *American Historical Review*, 71, 1966, p. 875-892). 9. *Le Courrier de l'Armée*, no. 677, 23.11.1919 and no.681, 21.12.1919. 10. *Gazette de la Croix*, 10.8.1926. 11. ROBERT DEVLEESHOUWER, "L'opinion publique et les revendications territoriales belges à la fin de la première guerre mondiale", in *Mélanges offerts à G. Jacquemyns*, Bruxelles, 1968, p. 207-38. 12. *Note remise parPuiset, Impériali and Jules Destrée à la commission des affaires extérieures à propos de Mlamedy (sic)* [*Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères* (AAEB), D3311, nr. 10]. 13. MARTIN R. SCHÄRER, *Deutsche Annexionspolitik im Westen. Die Wiedereingliederung Eupen-Malmedys im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Bern/Frankfurt am Main, 1978², p. 86; GERD KLEU, *Die Neuordnung der Ostkantone Belgiens 1945-1956. Politik, Kultur und Wirtschaft in Eupen, Malmedy und St.Vith*, Essen, 2007, p. 12.

the population however were ethnic German. The town of Malmedy itself had just 6,000 inhabitants and was largely dependent on its famed paper milling and tanning industries¹⁴. Eupen was geographically a much smaller *Kreis* than Malmedy albeit more densely populated. The 15,000 inhabitants who lived there were in the main employed in textiles, weaving and in agriculture¹⁵.

The law of 15 September 1919 established the transitory Eupen-Malmedy Government of an indefinite duration under Baltia. Baltia embarked on a project of nation-building at a time when many new nation states were forming across Europe. Even so, the territory in which this mission was to take place sat on one of the many geopolitical fault lines of the post-war period alongside the neighbouring contested territory of Alsace -Lorraine. Baltia likened the granting of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium in place of the great expectations demanded by the Belgian delegation in Paris as “giving a gourmand a bone to chew”¹⁶. He was surprised with Belgian Prime Minister Léon Delacroix’s rather lax attitude as to how the administration was to operate. In his memoirs Baltia writes, “Delacroix appeared to have thought no more about giving me directives”. When he queried the Prime Minister as to what might be expected of his

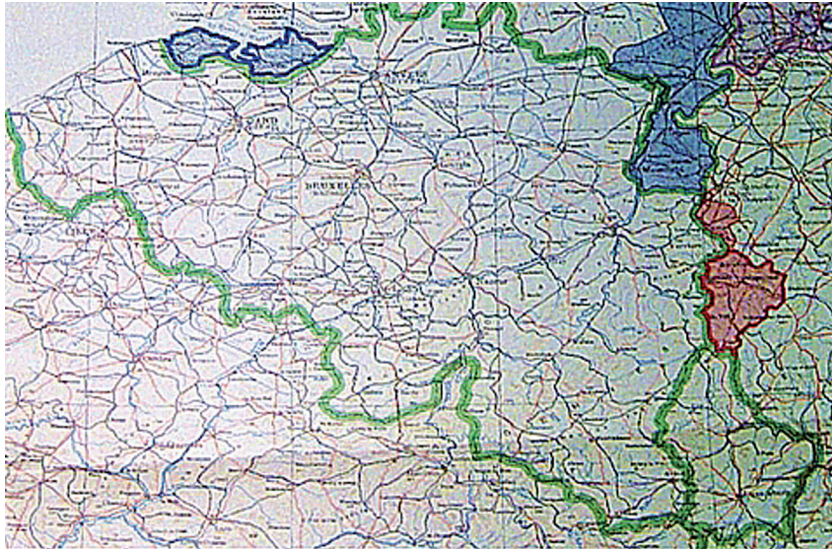
administration in the short term he was met with the following response:

“See that it goes well and that it doesn’t cost too much. When you will have good things to communicate to me, do so. You will be like a colonial governor but a colony directly connected to the Metropolis”¹⁷.

The cession of Eupen-Malmedy by the Versailles Treaty was conditional on the holding of a popular consultation (described in the treaty as a “public expression of opinion”)¹⁸. As soon as he was installed in his seat of government in Malmedy, Baltia set about administering the popular consultation with zeal. He clearly understood the perils attached to such a far from assured endeavor. Writing to Delacroix in February he warned, “If the results [of the consultation] and the decision of the League of Nations will go against us, I should not alone with my functionaries bear the responsibility”¹⁹. The wording of Article 34 of the Versailles Treaty gave free reign to Belgium to exploit the consultation while the international community looked the other way. A fair criticism of the article would be that it was too limited in its explication as to how the entire exercise was to be conducted²⁰. Berlin registered serious misgivings at the lack of checks and balances associated with

14. *Statistique de la Belgique. Population, Recensement Général*, 31.12.1920, p. 570-583.

15. LUCIEN COLSON, *Malmedy et les territoires rétrocédés*, Liège, 1921, p. 21. 16. *Idem*, p. 7-9. 17. Landesarchiv Nord-Rhein Westfalen (LANRW), RW/10/5, *Sammlung Baltia. Erinnerungen des belgischen Generals Baltia, 1918-1922, Gouverneur (Hochkommissar) für die abgetretenen Gebiete Eupen-Malmedy aus seiner Tätigkeit [Erinnerungen Baltia]*, p.7-9; CHRISTOPH BRÜLL, “Eupen-Malmedy 1918-1945...”, p. 8-9; FREDDY CREMER & WERNER MIESSEN, *Spuren. Materialien zur Geschichte der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens*, Eupen, 1995, p. 9 (Cegesoma, BA21/668). 18. HEINZ DOEPGEN, *DIE ABTRETUNG DES GEBIETES VON EUPEN-MALMEDY AN BELGIEN IM JAHRE 1920*, BONN, 1966, p. 115-179. 19. *Eupen-Malmedy, Herman Baltia to Léon Delacroix*, 9.2.1920 (AAEB, 10/792/II/1654). 20. *The Versailles Treaty*, iii.i.34, 28.6.1919.



A map of Belgium in 1920. The districts of Eupen-Malmedy are in pink with the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to the south. Immediately to the north of Eupen is the Dutch province of Limburg which Belgium also failed to acquire at the Paris Peace Conference along with Flemish Zeeland (also in blue on the map, bordering the north-west of Belgium).
(National Archives of the United Kingdom, London, FO / 3644B)

Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith, on the border between Belgium and Germany, are also highlighted.
(National Archives of the United Kingdom, London, FO / 3644B)

the consultation and not least the fact that the League of Nations had not entrusted the surveillance of the popular consultation to a neutral observer. What's more, the process was to be an open one where locals would have to travel from their villages and farms to the *Hôtel de Ville* in either Eupen or Malmedy and sign the register of protest in the presence of Baltia's functionaries²¹.

Throughout the course of the consultation numerous allegations of intimidation by the Belgian authorities were highlighted by both German and neutral observers alike. When the registers finally closed on 23 July, only 271 names out of an eligible total of more than 33,726 inhabitants appeared on the register of protest²². The result was later endorsed by the League of Nations on 20 September 1920 and the sovereign status of the territory resolved or so it appeared, in the eyes of the international community. The following day the Belgian tricolour flew on all state buildings across the kingdom and in Eupen-Malmedy²³. In the Belgian parliament the Government's proclamation began the official process of writing the new national narrative. The government's proclamation stuck rigidly to the myth of a Belgian nation once again restored by stating that "after a separation of more than a century, the two districts have come back to the *mère patrie*". Belgium could now be doubly satisfied not only having come

out of the war on the winning side but having also liberated "the national soil of her children who freely came back to her"²⁴.

Up to the termination of the transitory Eupen-Malmedy Government in 1925 Baltia and his government engineered a process of incremental change which involved a synthesis of newly introduced Belgian and existing German legislation whilst at all times promising to take account of the *droits acquis* (vested interests) of the inhabitants. As Belgian legislation was gradually introduced during the initial phase of the transitory process, what transpired was a peeling back of the layers of decrees, *arrêtés* and other pieces of legislation which had accumulated under previous regimes. Baltia's role was to facilitate the legislative, administrative and juridical incorporation of the districts into the Belgian state. This was almost totally achieved when the transitory government was eventually wound down in June 1925. The more demanding mission of assimilating what Selm Wenselaers describes as these 'last Belgians' into the Belgian nation was still far from certain²⁵.

Be that as it may in 1925 the outgoing Foreign Minister Henri Jaspar was in no doubt that "the moment had come to integrate these people into the Belgian family [*dans la famille belge*]. To do otherwise would mean that instead of a

21. KLAUS PABST, "Das Problem der deutsch-belgischen Grenze in der Politik der letzten 150 Jahre", in *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, 77, 1965, p. 183-210. 22. HEINZ DOEPGEN, *Die Abtretung...*, p. 115-212; FREDDY CREMER & WERNER MIESSEN, *Spuren...*, p. 9. 23. *Incorporation of Eupen-Malmedy into Kingdom of Belgium*, Sir George Grahame to Earl Curzon of Kedleston, 21.9.1920 [The National Archives (TNA), FO/371/5456]. 24. "Eupen-Malmedy", in *Moniteur belge*, 20 & 22.9.1920 (AAEB, 10.792/III/10). 25. SELM WENSELAERS, *De laatste Belgen. Een geschiedenis van de Oostkantons*, Antwerpen, 2008.

de-annexation from Germany, Belgium would have performed merely an opportunistic annexation and this did not sit well with 'the esteemed role played by Belgium during the war'²⁶. Thus by the law of 6 June Eupen-Malmedy became absorbed into the province of Liège²⁷. The national elections later that year were the first in which the inhabitants of what were now three districts would participate in tandem with the rest of the Belgian population²⁸. In the interim, representatives of Belgium's main political parties visited the towns and villages promising the populace a much freer and inclusive political existence. "Soon you will feel the difference" exclaimed the outgoing Liberal representative for Verviers and Minister for National Defence Pierre Forthomme at a rally when comparing the political future that awaited these "rediscovered brothers" (*frères retrouvés*) against the state of exception that had gone before²⁹.

The results of the 1925 election albeit a resounding victory for the *Union catholique* in the territory, did not reveal a great deal about the national allegiance of what was in any case a predominantly Catholic population³⁰. Prior to the annexation, the staunchly Catholic German *Zentrum Partei* had equally enjoyed

strong support in the region³¹. Yet in spite of the *Union catholique's* success, the deputy elected to represent the territory was the socialist candidate and member of the *Parti ouvrier belge* (POB) was Marc Somerhausen, a 25 year old lawyer originally from Ghent³². His election owed much to the majority socialist vote produced in the more urbanised arrondissement of Verviers to which Eupen, Malmedy and St.Vith were now attached³³. Whilst no indigenous pro-German party campaigned in the election, the socialists strongly advocated the holding of a new and secret plebiscite. Somerhausen in line with his party colleagues was concerned with how the entire period of Baltia's tenure had impacted on the inhabitants of the contested territory. He was also of the view that the disgraceful episode of the public expression of opinion in 1920 had served only to damage Belgium's claim to the districts. He furthermore claimed that the assimilatory efforts under Baltia had alienated these 'new Belgians' noting : "One must not lose sight of the fact that the majority of these people served voluntarily, courageously under German flags. It is not a question here of individuals like the Alsatians and Lorrainers who marched *contre-coeur* (reluctantly) or deserted"³⁴.

26. *Chambre*, 4.3.1925, p. 855-856 (KBR, *Annales Parlementaires*, M.B.19). 27. *Conseil des Ministres* (1916-1949), 6.6.1925 [Archives générales du Royaume (AGR) BE-A0510/1252/02]. 28. Malmedy had been divided into Malmedy and St.Vith in 1921. 29. Pierre Forthomme, addressing a Liberal Party meeting at the Hôtel de l'Europe (*La Nouvelle Belgique*, 4.4.1925). 30. JOCHEN LENTZ, *Das Wahlverhalten in den Kantonen Eupen, Malmedy und St.Vith bei den Parlamentswahlen von 1925-1939*, Eupen, 2000, p. 29-55. 31. PIERRE MAXENCE, *Les atouts gaspillés, ou le drame des Cantons de l'Est*, St.-Niklaas, 1951, p. 29-30; KLAUS PABST, "Eupen-Malmedy in der belgischen Regierung – und Parteienpolitik 1914-1940", in *Zeitschrift des Aachener Gesichtsvereins*, 1964, p. 354-356. 32. KLAUS PABST, "Eupen-Malmedy in der belgischen Regierung – und Parteienpolitik...", p. 354. 33. ROGER E. DE SMET, *René Evalenko & William Fraeys, Atlas des élections belges 1919-1954. Annexe statistique*, Bruxelles, 1958, p. 10. 34. *Le Peuple*, 26.12.1925.



Lieutenant-general Herman Baltia in 1921. As the High Commissioner of the annexed territories of Eupen-Malmedy between 1920 and 1925, he was accountable only to the prime minister. Baltia combined legislative and executive powers. (Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History Brussels, B 1.130.2)

The outcome of the general election was followed by 73 days of wrangling (the longest such gap of the inter-war period) before a Catholic-Socialist government was eventually formed. This was hardly the greatest example of the benefits attaching to Belgian democracy³⁵. Yet in spite of this 1925 was a promising year, not alone for these new Belgians but for the wider European continent also. Rapprochement had replaced the mutual distrust of the previous few years as Germany's Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann and his French counterpart Aristide Briand made efforts to forge a new era of understanding in the wake of the Ruhr crisis³⁶. As the interchanges over a Rhineland pact continued, a parallel process of deliberation between Belgian and German contacts gathered pace also³⁷.

II. 'Selling Souls': Belgian-German Negotiations on the Retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy

Belgium had been devastated by the war, and although it had been fortunate to be exempted from payment of its war debts, its economic recovery was severely hampered by the marks

question. This had its genesis in Germany's injection of over six billion marks into the Belgian economy during the occupation³⁸. Albeit withdrawn from circulation after the war by the *Banque nationale*, the Belgian Government over ambitiously fixed the value of the occupation currency at a very generous exchange rate of 1.25 francs to the mark. This was in anticipation of Germany being forced to reimburse Belgium as part of the post-war peace agreement. The Government thus assumed the responsibility of repaying the *Banque nationale* from expected reparation dividends. Attempts to incorporate such a stipulation into the Versailles Treaty fell on deaf ears³⁹. Even the Dawes Plan which acted as a catalyst for post-war rapprochement was to make no allocation for Belgium's mark problem⁴⁰. To add further to Belgium's woes once the Government revealed its generous redemption additional marks were smuggled into the territory. Hence, as the German currency became further weakened over the coming years the ever worsening financial situation impacted exponentially on Belgium's financial status. Yet by 1925 this seemingly intractable issue now looked as if it could be circumvented by other means⁴¹.

35. CARL-HENDRIK HÖJER, *Le régime parlementaire belge de 1918 à 1940*, Uppsala, 1946, p. 145-147. 36. JOHN HORNE, "Locarno et la politique de démobilisation culturelle 1925-1930", in *Démobilisations culturelles après la Grande Guerre* (Theme issue) 14-18 *Aujourd'hui-Today-Heute*, 5, Paris, 2002, p. 73-87. 37. "Germany and the Eupen-Malmedy Affair, 1924-1926: 'Here lies the spirit of Locarno'", in *Central European History*, 8 (3), 9.1975, p. 221-250 (224). 38. ROBERT P. GRATHWOL, "Germany and the Eupen-Malmedy Affair 1924-26", in *Central European History*, nr. 3, 1975 (8), p. 221-50; JACQUES BARIÉTY, "Le projet de rétrocession d'Eupen-Malmedy par la Belgique à l'Allemagne, et la France (1925-1926). Un cas d'utilisation de l'arme financière en politique internationale", in *Les relations franco-belges de 1830 à 1934*, Metz, 1974, p. 325-348. 39. ROBERT P. GRATHWOL, "Germany and the Eupen-Malmedy affair...", p. 221-250. 40. This was essentially a plan whereby Germany would pay reduced reparations albeit the final amount was not specified (MANFRED J. ENSSLE, *Stresemann's territorial revisionism. Germany, Belgium and the Eupen-Malmedy question 1919-1929*, Wiesbaden, 1980, p. 69). 41. ROBERT P. GRATHWOL, "Germany and the Eupen-Malmedy Affair...", p. 223.

Already by November 1924 advances were being made to Germany with the specific aim of finding a resolution to the marks question through the intercession of the former Belgian Prime Minister Léon Delacroix; now Belgium's representative on the Reparations Commission. By December of that year the President of the *Reichsbank*, Dr. Hjalmar Schacht held follow-up talks with Émile Francqui an influential Belgian financier, centering on finding a solution to Belgium's economic ills⁴². The following March Schacht paid a visit to Brussels and again met with Francqui and the president of Belgium's *Banque nationale*, Fernand Hautin. Schacht now developed the matter further by linking the redemption of marks to the redemption of Eupen-Malmedy by Germany. Delacroix also seemed keen to proceed on that basis. Around the same time, the British Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain was expressing some reservations over the legitimacy of Eupen-Malmedy's status within Belgium in view of the fact that the referendum as provided for by the Treaty of Versailles was somewhat distorted in its application⁴³.

Schacht also had a meeting with the Belgian Prime Minister Georges Theunis. The encounter was described as "very courteous and the question of marks was not raised". Schacht suggested to Francqui that

a favourable solution to the marks question was possible if Belgium returned the annexed territories. Addressing the cabinet, Theunis estimated that it was impossible to take such a suggestion into consideration; the main concern being how Britain and France would view such a move⁴⁴. In February 1925, somewhat buoyed by the wave of optimism following agreement on the Dawes Plan, and the more conciliatory stance being taken by Edouard Herriot's *Cartel des Gauches* administration in France, Germany dispatched the draft text of a "security pact proposal" to both London and Paris advocating "a pact expressly guaranteeing the present territorial status [*gegenwärtiger Besitzstand*] on the Rhine"⁴⁵. The proposal contained no reference to Belgium. Stresemann argued that arbitration agreements were the best route to take in terms of the lesser continental powers such as Belgium and Luxembourg. It would in time become clear that Stresemann's intentions for a revision of Germany's eastern borders lay at the heart of his pact proposal. But it was not the sole motivation. Germany was equally anxious to precipitate an allied evacuation of the Rhineland. The Versailles Treaty stipulated that the Rhineland would remain under allied occupation for 15 years with one allied zone being evacuated every five years following the Treaty coming into effect⁴⁶. Stresemann therefore calculated that a security pact which

42. KLAUS PABST, "Eupen-Malmedy in der belgischen Regierungs – und Parteienpolitik...", p. 456-457. 43. Manfred J. Enssle in his work on the negotiations over the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy to Germany states that it was unclear when Schacht had visited Brussels and suggests that it may have been April. However from the documentation available at the AMAEB it is clear that he visited Brussels in March 1925 [*Baron de Gaiffier d'Hestroy to Paris to Paul Hymans*, 10.3.1925 (AAEB, Eupen-Malmedy, 10.792/I/304/1446); MANFRED J. ENSSLE, *Stresemann's territorial revisionism...*, p. 102]. 44. *Conseil des Ministres (1916-1949)*, 24.3.1925 (AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02). 45. The text of the security pact is cited in full in "German and French notes on the Security Pact", in *Advocate of Peace Through Justice*, 87 (8), 8.1925, p. 491-493. 46. *The Treaty of Versailles*, xiv. i.429, 28.6.1919.

would ease French fears by guaranteeing the existing Rhineland borders would in turn facilitate an early evacuation of the entire Rhineland⁴⁷.

The German Foreign Minister sought to agree a separate bilateral agreement with Belgium; leaving open the question of Eupen-Malmedy's future status. This exclusion of Belgium was eventually reversed following French insistence that all such matters pertaining to Germany's western frontiers be included in a security pact. Stresemann knew that any such agreement which recognised Germany's western borders as inviolable would smother any attempted rectification of the Eupen-Malmedy question, especially one premised on a financial exchange. He therefore sought to ensure that any future security pact agreed with the allies, while abrogating war as solution would not exclude the possibility of achieving such an end through peaceful negotiation.

Pleased with the way in which the Locarno negotiations were progressing Stresemann met with Robert Everts the Belgian Minister in Berlin in October 1925⁴⁸. Stresemann looked on the Rhineland Pact as a point of

departure whereby Germany and Belgium could begin a new relationship, particularly in terms of economic cooperation. For Stresemann Locarno was not merely an end in itself but "the beginning of a collaboration of confidence"⁴⁹. He saw no contradiction between the aims of the Locarno negotiations and his objective in seeking a return of Eupen-Malmedy to Germany. Hence, the German foreign minister expressed a willingness to examine the possibility of dealing with the marks question with the intention that it would pave the way for the eventual retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy⁵⁰. Whilst not wholly critical of Stresemann's viewpoint, Everts nevertheless conveyed the difficulties that would be posed in linking the payment of monies to the territorial question, and how "it would be impossible for the Belgian Government to expose itself to being reproached for selling a territory granted to it by the Treaty of Versailles"⁵¹. An internal memo in the Belgian Foreign Ministry discounted the viability of such a move whilst throwing suspicion on German good will. It contended, "In effect, it's at the moment where Germany has barely initialed the Locarno Accords that she is already looking to renege on her engagements"⁵².

47. An end to allied control of German disarmament was also a consideration [GUSTAV STRESEMANN, *Vermächtnis. Der Nachlass in drei Bänden*, Berlin, 1932, Bd. ii, p. 67-69 (edited by H. Bernard, Wolfgang Goetz & Paul Wiegler)]. 48. *Eupen-Malmedy-zeit der Sicherheitspaktverhandlungen bis zur 1. Ablehenden Antwort der belg. Regierung*, E120424-5, Gustav Stresemann, *Abschrift*, Reichsministerium, 2534, 20.10.1925 [Auswärtiges Amt (AA), R 29.057k]. 49. VALENTINE THOMSON, *Briand. Man of peace*, New York, 1930, p. 29. 50. MANFRED J. ENSLE, *Stresemann's territorial revisionism...*, p. 80-114. 51. Robert Everts to Émile Vandervelde, 21.10.1925 (AAEB, 10.792/I/7116/1957, Eupen-Malmedy, 'Pacte de Sécurité'); *Eupen-Malmedy-zeit der Sicherheitspaktverhandlungen bis zur 1. Ablehenden Antwort der belg. Regierung*, E120424-5, Gustav Stresemann, 'Abschrift', Reichsministerium, 22.10.1925 (AA, R 29.057k); Carl von Schubert, *Staatssekretär, Abschrift*, 22.10.1925; *Eupen-Malmedy zeit der Sicherheitspaktverhandlungen bis zur 1. Ablehenden Antwort der belg. Regierung*, Stresemann to Schacht, 22.10.1925 (AA, R 29.057k/E120426/5-8). 52. *Eupen-Malmedy, Note to Émile Vandervelde, Belgian Foreign Minister*, 27.10.1925 (AAEB, 10.792/I/20).

However Stresemann told the *Reichstag's* foreign affairs committee in January that the connection between the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy in return for a resolution of Belgium's marks question had not originated with him but came from "various sides in Belgium"⁵³. When Aloys Van de Vyvere, who held the post of Belgian Prime Minister briefly in 1925, met with Dr. Schacht in December of that year, they talked about the possible payment of marks by Germany to Belgium and the organisation of a new plebiscite. Stresemann seemed optimistic that France was on the brink of entertaining discussions of a similar nature over the Saarland. In exchange for abandoning its insistence on deferring any consultation in the Saar before fifteen years, France could acquire mining rights in the mineral basin. As Enssle points out, Stresemann seemed to have overestimated the extent to which Germany's relatively strong economic position could dictate its revisionist ambitions⁵⁴. Indeed the German Chancellor furthermore overlooked French concerns for the future of Alsace-Lorraine⁵⁵.

Vandervelde had previously written to Everts in November pointing out that the question of rendering Eupen-Malmedy back to Germany was all the more peculiar since the Locarno Treaty had just reinforced Belgium's present status. Furthermore, he warned that as far as France was concerned such a development

would be interpreted as undermining its newly reclaimed territories of Alsace and Lorraine. 'Belgium', he wrote, "in welcoming Germany's overtures would gravely compromise itself in the eyes of the allies"⁵⁶. The Foreign Ministry was quick to dismiss suggestions that the question of altering Eupen-Malmedy's status had been entertained either at Locarno or London. A press release insisted that "Not a word was uttered with regard to this subject and no such transaction had begun"⁵⁷.

In spite of their denials and hushed diplomacy, by March further communications had taken place between Stresemann and Belgian representatives⁵⁸. In a meeting with Everts, Stresemann suggested solving the question of Eupen-Malmedy through the initiation of a new Belgian-German "friendship treaty" where all other questions could be addressed including the marks question. He looked forward to meeting with Vandervelde 'in private'. According to Stresemann Everts was of the opinion that Belgium did not want to be seen to be taking the first step and preferred to see the matter put before 'her friends' in order to measure their reaction. Furthermore Everts seemed anxious that agreement be reached on the kinds of figures involved. Stresemann insisted that one must first be clear as to whether an agreement was at all possible "even beyond the numbers". He suggested to Everts that if Vandervelde were "ready for

53. Köpke to *Auswärtiges Amt*, 16.1.1926 [AA, Belgien, (Bd.2-Bd.3), R/28581/D/590636/56].

54. MANFRED J. ENSSLE, *Stresemann's territorial revisionism...*, p. 122-123. 55. *Idem*, p. 115-120. 56. *Émile Vandervelde to Robert Everts*, 3.11.1925, letter cited in *Note pour le Roi sur la Question d'Eupen-Malmedy*, p.10-11, 6.8.1926 (AAEB, 10.792/I/27, Eupen-Malmedy, Eupen-Malmedy). 57. AA, *Eupen-Malmedy-zeit der Sicherheitspaktverhandlungen bis zur 1. Ablehenden Antwort der belg. Regierung*, R 29057k/E120424/14/560, Telegram, 16.12.1925, *Circulaire d'information*, no.147, 17.12.1925. 58. *Émile Vandervelde to Baron de Cartier de Marchienne*, 28.12.1925 (AAEB, 10.792/613/34, Eupen-Malmedy).



The city of Eupen lies on the river Vesder and borders on the vast Ducal Forest. With 15,000 inhabitants in 1920, it was the largest city in the annexed German territory. Below: Eupen's Town Hall where inhabitants could voice their protest in 1920, under the benign eye of the new rulers. (Cegesoma, nr. 35777 and nr. 35779)

serious negotiations", he for his part was ready to consult with the Governor of the Bank of England Montagu Norman, and the Agent General for Reparations Parker Gilbert on the design of the scheme⁵⁹.

In March Delacroix was back in Berlin and met with Stresemann. During previous visits Delacroix and Dr. Schacht had discussed the possibility of Germany handing over five million German marks to the Belgian Government. Now Gustav Stresemann wished to take up where the previous talks had ended and simultaneously explore the question of the retrocession of Eupen and Malmedy. Delacroix was open to such a discussion but made it clear that in order that the talks reach a successful conclusion two conditions would have to be adhered to. One was that the Belgian Government could not hope to impose a new referendum in the cantons without the imprimatur of the British and French Governments. Therefore it was up to Germany to make representations in London and in Paris in order to facilitate such an outcome⁶⁰.

Secondly, as far as the repayment of marks was concerned it was imperative that Berlin make a suitable offer which would be acceptable to Brussels. Stresemann duly agreed to the conditions and urged Delacroix to speak again to Dr Schacht about the exchange of marks. As with Stresemann, the President of the *Reichsbank* was of the opinion that the German Government would not be able to

formulate a proposition without having prior consultation with the English and American, and made it known to Delacroix that he was going to raise the issue within Norman and Gilbert in a matter of days⁶¹.

Édouard Rolin-Jaequemyns now Belgian Interior Minister showed little enthusiasm for such a strategy. His analysis of the situation is revealing. He told Everts : "The Belgian Government can only but reject Stresemann's overture. The organisation of a plebiscite in the *territoires annexés* would be unjustified. In effect, the annexation of this territory in 1918 (*sic*) was not motivated by the will of the peoples; they were only consulted to verify if an accentuated [German] national will was going to become an obstacle to a more important and desired annexation, whether right or wrong, by the Belgian Government"⁶².

Albeit conceding that the method of execution of the public expression of opinion in 1920 was not above criticism, Jaequemyns believed that if anything, the results demonstrated "beyond doubt, that the population of the annexed territories were in large part lukewarm and indifferent" to the outcome⁶³. The more the Belgian Government considered its options, the less it began to look favourably on tinkering with the *status quo* not least in light of the Locarno Treaty. Vandervelde told the cabinet on 3 May "it is impossible to begin negotiations on this subject as long as the British and French governments have not taken the initiative"⁶⁴.

59. *Unterredung mit Herrn Delacroix*, 26.3.1926 (AA, R285.81, Belgien, Bd.2-3, D/590670-74/91-5). 60. Robert Everts, *Belgian Minister in Berlin to Émile Vandervelde*, 27.3.1926 (AAEB, 10.792/1, Eupen-Malmedy). 61. *Ibidem*. 62. *Note de Rolin Jacquemyns to Everts*, 26.4.1926 (AAEB, 10.792/1/40, Eupen-Malmedy, "Strictement Confidentiel"). 63. *Ibidem*. 64. *Conseil des Ministres (1916-1949)*, 3.5.1926 (AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02).

By 8 May Vandervelde was rowing back on the advances made by Delacroix. He told Everts in Berlin that "It is important above all to note that Mr Delacroix in his conversation with Mr Stresemann (...) only forwarded a personal opinion; the Government of the King not having charged him with any mission to this end"⁶⁵. Vandervelde now insisted that the question of the recovery of marks from Germany was a "moral obligation" which the German administration had to fulfill "unconditionally"⁶⁶. Stresemann reacted calmly on hearing of the latest shift in opinion from Brussels. He believed that the occasion to discuss the holding of a referendum in Eupen-Malmedy would present itself again, once Germany was represented on the Council of the League of Nations⁶⁷. But while Brussels may have appeared reticent, the prospect of doing some kind of a deal had not been entirely discounted.

On 26 July Henri Jaspar, who had only recently taken over as Prime Minister, asked Francqui if Germany was willing to pay "an important sum" independent of the Eupen-Malmedy question. At the time Delacroix had gone to Berlin to meet again with Schacht. Francqui drew the cabinet's attention to the current financial situation in Belgium. The Belgian economy was operating a deficit of between 300 and 400 million francs per month. There was the added problem of exterior debt payments which were due in three months amounting to a sum of 45,000,000 francs.

"But where to find this money?" he asked. "Germany which is currently teeming with money following the industrial crisis has just made us a proposition". The *Reichsbank* offered to immediately pour 30 million dollars into the Belgian state. The loan would be paid to the *Banque nationale* to the account of the Belgian state.

Francqui advised that France ought to be consulted before committing to any deal. Jaspar sought clarification on the fact that the *Reichsbank* offered to lend 30 million dollars to be paid back over 30 monthly payments from 30 Nov. 1926. "Our situation would be greatly improved" he told the cabinet "as instead of disposing of 5 million dollars per month we would have to pay only 1 million a month which would be possible for us to support". Jaspar was eager to go down this route, but he too recognised the importance of obtaining French permission. Vandervelde agreed to support such a move and proposed together with Francqui, to consult with the French Government in Paris. Justice Minister Hymans lent his support to the meeting also, asking; "In the event that it would be opposed, one should ask what [Paris] proposes instead". Jaspar was satisfied with the cabinet's unanimity in favour of a demarche to Paris. In terms of public knowledge the meeting was to be portrayed as Brussels simply making contact with the new French Government under Raymond Poincaré⁶⁸.

65. *Émile Vandervelde to Robert Everts*, 8.5.1926 (AAEB, 10792/III/43/350/26). 66. EBERHARD KOLB, *The Weimar Republic*, London, 2004, p. 75. 67. *Robert Everts to Émile Vandervelde*, 27.5.1926 (AAEB, 10.792/III/44). 68. Poincaré took over as Prime Minister of France and leader of the *Democratic Alliance* government [*Alliance démocratique*] which was a government of National Union (1926-9), replacing the *Cartel des Gauches* under Aristide Briand and briefly under Edouard Herriot. It would be his final tenure as French Premier [*Conseil des Ministres* (1916-1949)], 26.7.1926 (AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02)].

Around this time a report prepared for the Belgian king by Count Pierre van Zuylen at the Belgian Foreign Ministry presented the arguments for and against Eupen-Malmedy remaining part of Belgium⁶⁹. It asked, "if Belgium, free of all engagement had to decide whether it was advantageous or dangerous to attach Eupen and Malmedy to its territory". The report began by first arguing the wisdom of not acquiring the territory, citing three specific reasons which, had they been made public would have surely have sounded the death knell for Belgium's annexation.

The first of these points stated how the population of the district had not dreamt of an attachment to Belgium. If in some cases the ties of friendship and of neighbourliness were affirmed on either side of the border between Eupen-Malmedy and Belgium as proof of a common existence since ancient times, there was never a serious aspiration towards union. The people were 'attached' to Germany and "had not asked to change *patrie*"⁷⁰.

The second point argued how the reattachment to Belgium rendered any reconciliation to Germany more difficult. In effect, Germany continued to consider the people as its own and sought to create an irredentist agitation. This was a worrying development the report warned as, "[T]he day when the *Reich* wishes to undertake a war of revenge it will find in this question a pretext by which to attack us"⁷¹. In arguing against the annexation the report finally noted how there seemed to be

"no serious strategic reasons" to compensate for the disadvantages already stated. In total, it suggested that the advantages of the annexation were not worth the risks endured. On the other hand, the union of the districts with Belgium, endorsed by the League of Nations made it impossible to return them to Germany. Chiefly because the people who hadn't considered an attachment to Belgium had since become either accommodated or resigned to the new regime. A number had furthermore already demonstrated their loyalty to Belgium by taking the oath of allegiance to the king and the state⁷².

Van Zuylen suggested that if the district of Malmedy and the surrounding Walloon villages were not included in the retrocession to Germany this latter issue would not pose a problem. In this way, even at the heart of the political establishment it was recognized that assimilation to the Belgian nation had not happened. Fear was expressed over the problems which a new consultation would bring. In the first instance it would mean admitting to irregularities in the first consultation and would furthermore be interpreted as "a blatant denial of the League of Nation's ratification". Of course, at the core of such fears were the implications which the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy in whole or in part would have on the Versailles Treaty itself. Such a move threatened to isolate Belgium internationally at a time when it needed commitments from France and Belgium in the wake of the Locarno

69. Baron Pierre van Zuylen was appointed to the second section of the *Comité politique* at the *Ministère des Affaires étrangères* in January 1921 with responsibility for Northern Europe. He would serve in this post until October 1944. 70. Baron Pierre van Zuylen, *Note pour le Roi sur la question d'Eupen-Malmedy*, 6.8.1926 [(AAEB, 10.792/III/27). 71. *Idem*, p. 16. 72. *Idem*, p. 17.

Accords⁷³. In spite of these fears the report listed a number of the benefits which might accrue to Belgium in the event of striking a deal. The only way of moving things forward in this regard was for Germany to take the initiative to remove any obstacles resulting from the Treaty. Whether or not Germany did this in conjunction with France and England or whether it did so at the League of Nations didn't matter. At all costs Belgium could not be seen to have taken the first step⁷⁴.

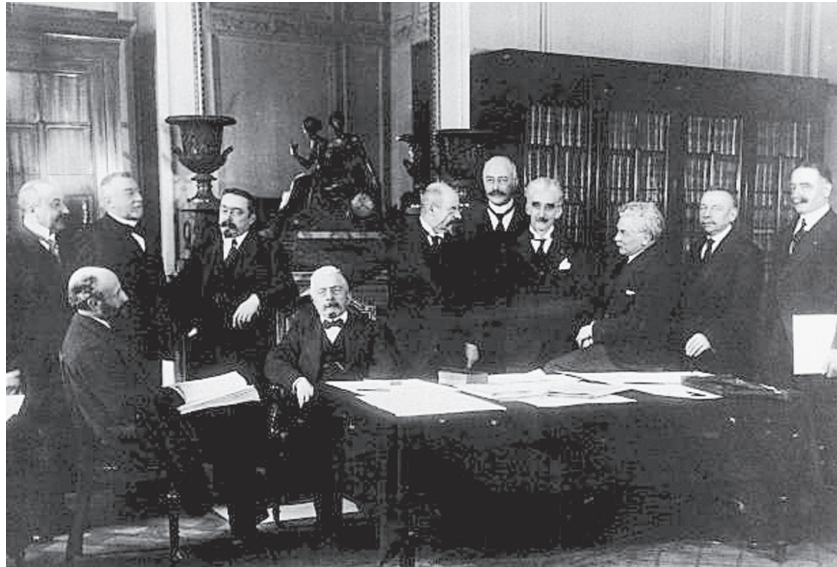
III. France's Double Game

As Belgian officials individually and collectively continued to hypothesise about the prospect of Eupen-Malmedy being returned to Germany either in part or whole, it was always a given that any agreement would depend on the approval of both Britain and France. The meeting between French and Belgian officials on the situation in Eupen-Malmedy took place on 30 July 1926, at the French spa town of Châtel Guyon in the Auvergne where Belgian ministers tested the waters of French opinion. The meeting was attended by Vandervelde, and Francqui as well as Baron de Gaiffier for the Belgian side. Across the table sat Poincaré now once again French Premier and beside him Aristide Briand, who as Foreign Minister had been one of the chief architects of Locarno⁷⁵. Vandervelde opened the session by providing a brief *résumé* on how Eupen-Malmedy had been annexed to Belgium. He observed that the 'retrocession' of the cantons to Belgium at that time was something that concerned not only Belgium and Germany

but was of interest to the whole of Europe. He reminded those present how during the negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference the POB had raised objections against the acquisition by Belgium of purely German villages. He then insisted that an acquisition of this nature was "in opposition to the political principles professed by Belgians", and "had the potential for stoking up trouble down the road". Vandervelde went on to claim how he was close to resigning over the issue at the time. He rowed back on this in view of the trouble it would have brought to the delegation's work. Having listed the efforts made by the Belgian state in recent months in attempting to tidy up its finances, Vandervelde outlined the communications which had taken place between Dr Schacht and Delacroix over the recovery of the German marks. He told how Delacroix had raised with Everts the virtual impossibility the Germans would have in recovering the marks as they were tied by the conditions attaching to the Dawes Plan⁷⁶.

Instead, Germany offered to provide the Belgian Treasury with a loan of 30 million dollars. If Belgium would agree to link the loan to the return of the two districts Germany promised to offer extremely favourable interest and repayment terms. Stresemann, it was noted, was dogged in his intention to start negotiations on the matter and indicated that he would raise the issue at the time of Germany's admission to the League of Nations in Geneva. It was then hoped that it would be possible to organise a plebiscite in the cantons or at least in the strongly populated German communes.

73. *Idem*, p. 18-19. 74. *Idem*, p. 19-20. 75. JACQUES NÉRÉ, *The foreign policy of France from 1914-1945*, London, 1975, p. 65-80. 76. Baron de Gaiffier, *Entrevue entre les ministres belges et français du 30 juillet 1926, à 2 heures de l'après-midi*, 7.8.1926, p. 3 (AAEB, 10.792/I/55).



Belgium's first post-WWI government was led by Léon Delacroix. It consisted of six Catholic, three Socialist and three Liberal ministers. Next to Delacroix (on the far left) is Paul Hymans, Minister for Foreign Affairs, (fourth from the right) next to Henri Jaspar, the Minister of Economic Affairs, (third from the right). (Cegesoma, nr. 40916)

At the very mention of 'plebiscite' an irritated Poincaré intervened and shouted "That would be even worse". The gathering now took on a more intense atmosphere. Francqui took up the argument for the Belgians following Poincaré's intervention and detailed the difficulties being faced by the Belgian Treasury and how beneficial a loan of 30 million dollars from Germany would be. 'Germany', he stated "is awash with gold. It doesn't know how to spend it"⁷⁷. This was in reference to the new loans arranged from the United States as part of the Dawes Plan⁷⁸. Poincaré then interrupted Francqui to verify if Germany's demands amounted to the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy and St.Vith in their entirety or just the ethnic German villages. "The German villages, most certainly" Francqui replied. Then, having listened to the Belgian representatives Poincaré gathered himself for a moment before replying : The Government of the Republic raises the most serious objections against any connection between a loan being granted to Belgium by Germany and the question of Eupen-Malmedy. The Reich does not attach a great importance to these cantons, on the contrary it attaches a very great importance to dismantling the Versailles Treaty. It has hatched and ripened its plan. It begins with Eupen-Malmedy to continue by Alsace⁷⁹.

It wasn't just in France that passions were raised. In Eupen the former secretary general of the Eupen-Malmedy Government Pierre Van Werveke was incredulous on hearing of the moves by Belgium to sell back the German speaking communes⁸⁰. He wondered, how "having governed the people of these districts for six years and having attempted to assimilate them into the state that Belgians dared to propose that we throw in the towel, and push for this abominable exchange". Van Werveke likened such notions to "selling souls"⁸¹. His criticisms were largely premised on the potentially adverse impact on the local economy if the districts returned to Germany, and not on any historical or ethnic grounds.

In spite of Poincaré's smothering of the prospect of a retrocession to Germany in late July, the Belgian Government took its time to quell rumours of an imminent deal being struck. It would take a further three weeks before a definitive statement was issued by the Belgian Prime Minister Henri Jaspar on the matter of the putative *Rückkauf*. In the meantime, local and international press reports continued to predict that a deal in some shape or form was imminent. The *Manchester Guardian* noted how "It is unquestionable that the plebiscite which took place in Eupen and Malmedy under the Peace Treaty was a

77. *Ibidem*. 78. PIERRE RENOUVIN, *Histoire des relations internationales. Les crises du XX^e siècle de 1914-1929*, Paris, 1957, p. 244-247. 79. *Entrevue entre les ministres belges et français du 30 Juillet 1926*, p. 5 (AAEB, 10.792/I/55). 80. Pierre Van Werveke (1893-1952) was a lawyer but also worked for some time as a journalist with *Libre Belgique*. He would succeed Baltia in 1923 following calls for Baltia's departure, however his powers would be greatly reduced as Brussels began to take a more direct role in the territory. Following the German invasion of 1940 he was arrested on account of his suspected anti-German activities. He was eventually released and fled to Brussels where after the war he worked as a lawyer at the Court of Appeal. He was later made a justice and sat in Eupen where he was also president of the *Elektrizitätsgesellschaft* (GERARD KLEU, *Die Neuordnung der Ostkantone Belgiens...*, p. 25). 81. Pierre Van Werveke in a letter to *Bien Public*, 11.8.1926 (AMAEB, 10.792/I/63, Eupen-Malmedy).

complete imposture, and that the population was always overwhelmingly pro-German. A new plebiscite would therefore be a matter of simple justice even if Belgium were to receive no indemnification⁸². According to its Berlin correspondent a plebiscite was likely in the autumn. He concluded "Humanly speaking, it would be all for the better if the inhabitants of Eupen, Malmedy and the Saar could be liberated from alien rule and sources of constant friction be removed"⁸³.

In Berlin, Everts appeared at sixes and sevens by mid-August when he wrote to Vandervelde: "In essence I really don't know which point of view to put forward in my conversations, and furthermore I have not received any information on the talks which ought to be in hand since Monsieur Delacroix's last visit to Berlin some weeks ago"⁸⁴.

When Henri Jaspar eventually issued a firm denial of any deal having been done with Germany the game was up. In response to a question posed by the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent in Brussels, Jaspar stated "there have never been, and there will not be, official negotiations on the part of the Belgian Government concerning the redeemed cantons there have been no official negotiations whatsoever"⁸⁵. His denial was equally represented in the German press as was British Prime Minister Austen Chamberlain's insistence that he had nothing to do with

blocking the negotiations⁸⁶. If the Belgian Government had unconditionally made clear to the outside world that it had no intention of exchanging les *cantons r  dim  s* in whole or part for whatever recompense was on offer, few were convinced. Jaspar was once more forced to issue a public statement on the inaccuracy of press reports in spite of his statement of 21 August. In a dispatch to the district commissioner of Verviers Jaspar noted that : I have already twice denied these fantastic rumours. As the press continues to be preoccupied with it, I beseech you to employ all of your influence on the authorities under your control to scotch these baseless utterings⁸⁷.

The rumours persisted however because in reality it was not Belgium but France which was to have the final say as to whether this double redemption of marks for 'souls' would go ahead. But for the intervention of Poincar   the result may have been altogether different. A lingering feeling of a lost opportunity among the Germans and thoughts of what might have been by a certain segment on the Belgian side continued to hang in the air. Later conversations between Briand and Stresemann at Thoiry on the margins of the Geneva summit that year to ratify the Locarno Accords ignited the possibility of some *quid pro quo* between France and Germany over Eupen-Malmedy. Germany had been admitted to the League of Nations earlier that month⁸⁸.

82. "Germany's lost provinces. Repurchase plan, Eupen, Malmedy and the Saar, Conversations begun" (*Manchester Guardian*, 13.8.1926); HEIDI CHRISTMANN, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation in Eupen-Malmedy zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen*, M  nchen, 1974, p. 318-24. 83. *Ibidem*. 84. Robert Everts to   mile Vandervelde, 18.8.1926 (AAEB, 10.792/1/6433/1770).

85. Henri Jaspar cited in *Daily Telegraph*, 21.8.1926 (AA, R285.81Belgien, Bd. 2-3, 54/204-5).

86. Robert Everts to   mile Vandervelde, 23.8.1926 (AAEB, 10.792/1/68). 87. Henri Jaspar cited in *La Libre Belgique*, 25.8.1926. 88. VALENTINE THOMSON, *Briand...*, p. 279.



After the annexation, German traffic signs were replaced by bilingual signs, which could lead to errors in the French version... (Cegesoma, nr. 35789)

Briand and Stresemann struck up a very close relationship during their virtual ownership of their respective foreign ministries. They now sought to build on the as yet fragile foundations of the Locarno Accords. At Thoiry the two men examined in general terms a number of possible solutions to some of the more vexing questions that divided France and Germany⁸⁹. Among which was the question of returning the Saarland to German sovereignty without a plebiscite. The idea being that Germany would buy back the Saar coalmines from France for some 300 million marks. The issue of German disarmament would have to be dealt with also, along with the winding down of the Inter-Allied Military Control Commission, which had been established to oversee German disarmament. In addition, the military occupation would be brought to an end well ahead of the 1935 deadline. If common agreement on all of these issues could be reached then Germany would be allowed a free hand to re-open negotiations with Belgium over the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy⁹⁰.

An enraged Prime Minister Jaspar told the Belgian cabinet that if the conversations between Germany and France were confirmed it would be necessary to make a formal protest to the French Government. It is in effect "intolerable that France, having made it clearly understood to us that she was

hostile to talks over the cession of Eupen-Malmedy, today, without consultation takes the initiative"⁹¹. When Vandervelde made a representation to the French ambassador Herbette he was assured that no accord with Germany would have been finalised without first consulting Belgium. Vandervelde was enthusiastic about the prospect of a settlement of the Eupen Malmedy question. However he was adamant that Belgium needed to be at the heart of the negotiations and not referred to as an afterthought when all details had been settled. Directions were to be given without delay to Belgium's foreign representatives⁹².

Such preoccupation with the Eupen-Malmedy question in spite of Jaspar's denials shows how fluid the situation remained in the autumn of 1926, six years after the Versailles Treaty had come into effect. One individual remained of a clear and fixed opinion as to how to proceed from this juncture. In an interview that summer General Baltia, echoed the words of US President Wilson in 1918 when he stated that "We cannot treat their inhabitants [of Eupen-Malmedy] like merchandise which one cedes to the highest bidder". Furthermore Baltia insisted that any doubt thrown on the legitimacy of the consultation of 1920 was unfounded. "As a soldier, I merely observed the Treaty of Versailles. There was no talk of a referendum, neither of a plebiscite, as claimed today by Germany"⁹³. Baltia had consistently

89. *Time*, 27.9.1926. 90. As Jacobson and Walker point out and as is evident from Stresemann's papers both he and Briand had long planned for such a meeting since the time of the Locarno Conference the previous year [GUSTAV STRESEMANN, *Vermächtnis. Der Nachlass in Drei Bänden*, Berlin, 1932-1933, ii, p. 437-438, 451-3, 465-6, 470-3 & iii, p. 15-16; JON JACOBSON & JOHN T. WALKER, "The impulse for a Franco-German entente. The origins of the Thoiry Conference, 1926", in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10 (1), 1.1975, p. 161-165].

91. *Conseil des Ministres (1916-1949)*, 21.9.1926 (AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02). 92. *Idem*, 6.10.1926. 93. Lieutenant General Baron Baltia cited in *Matin belge*, 18.9.1926.

made the distinction between a plebiscite or referendum and the popular consultation as stipulated by article 34 of the Versailles Treaty. But perception was just as important as procedure and the stain of *la petite farce belge* had not faded with time.

On New Year's Day 1927 most of the region's newspapers collectively published a petition addressed to the government in Brussels demanding that a new and secret plebiscite be held⁹⁴. In the rest of Belgium a similar campaign was led by the Socialists who looked on such a referendum as a necessary step to resolve the thorny issue of Eupen-Malmedy's future. The electoral success of the Socialists in the elections was seen as testament to the popularity of their stance on the plebiscite⁹⁵. The socialist deputy Marc Somerhausen endorsed this demand, stressing how after five years of a transitory government even the Walloons of Malmedy had hardly been assimilated to the Belgian State⁹⁶.

The Governor of Liège Gaston Grégoire published a proclamation confirming that Eupen-Malmedy and St.Vith would remain within Belgium and dismissing the prospect of a new popular consultation to decide the future of the territories. The proclamation was signed by the Prime Minister Henri Jaspar, Foreign Minister Emile Vandervelde and Interior Minister Vauthier⁹⁷. By now the threat of a quick sell off of Eupen-Malmedy either

in part or whole had abated. Nevertheless, the full impact of these events had yet to be felt. By the end of 1926 it seemed that for both Germany and Belgium the best opportunity yet to strike a deal on Eupen-Malmedy had passed. Yet as the shadow over these events slowly retreated the Belgian state would have to show just how ready it was to complete Baltia's project of assimilation and honour the commitments made in his proclamation. A second attempt by Germany in 1929 to reignite the Eupen-Malmedy for marks question did not meet with the same enthusiasm from the Belgian side⁹⁸. Even so Belgium's ham-fisted attempts at attempting to sell back the districts to Germany in 1926 did much to undermine its influence; its good faith having already been called into question following the infamous public expression of opinion in 1920. But these were not the only issues which threatened to undo the assimilatory project.

IV. Confluence of Conscience

The administrative structures put in place in the wake of Baltia's departure seemed *ad hoc* at best. In essence, there appeared to be little coordination between the different services of the state. The commissioner for the arrondissement of Verviers Bribosia was now also the representative of central government for the three districts of Eupen, Malmedy and

94. *La Semaine; Die Arbeit; Eupener Nachrichten; Der Landbote; Malmédy St. Vith Volkszeitung*. Three newspapers did not sign the petition however: *La Nouvelle Belgique; L'Invalide*; and *La Gazette des Métiers et Négoces*. 95. *Le Soir*, 9.1.1927; Obert de Thieusies, *Chargé d'Affaires de Belgique* to Émile Vandervelde, 10.1.1927 (AAEB, 10.792/1427-17); *Procureur du Roi, Verviers* to *Procureur Général*, 4.1.1927 (AAEB, 10.792/114). 96. Marc Somerhausen cited in *Die Arbeit*, 26.12.1925. 97. "Proclamation", 3.2.1927 (AAEB, 10.792/III). 98. MANFRED J. ENSSLE, *Stresemann's territorial revisionism...*, p.178-180; KLAUS PABST, "Eupen Malmedy in der belgischen Regierungs- und Parteienpolitik...", p. 481-488.

St.Vith. Bribosia had a considerable amount of additional problems with which to contend, not least the fact that the majority of his new charges were ethnic-German, while dearth of functionaries proficient in German severely hampered his administrative objectives. Whilst the *commissaires d'arrondissement* corresponded with their subordinates in German, at the provincial headquarters of the permanent deputation in Liège, which oversaw the entire province, not one person was proficient in the German language. Bribosia's only *ad-joint* was Jules de Grand Ry based in Eupen.

De Grand Ry had formerly been the District Commissioner for Eupen under Baltia, during which time he wielded considerable authority. Privately de Grand Ry believed that in the absence of a strongman such as Baltia the central administration in Brussels had fallen short in terms of facilitating the assimilation and had become estranged from its new citizens⁹⁹.

A memo written by the former district commissioner in 1927, posed a number of searching questions which the Belgian Government seemed unwilling to ask. De Grand Ry wondered : "To what must we attribute this lack of success which we have always sought to veil as much as possible in official reports?". He continued, "We have made many illusions as to the true sentiments which animate this population so fundamentally German and who, at the end of the day, never wanted to be attached to

Belgium". In a brief outline of the experiences of the cantons since their attachment to Belgium, de Grand Ry appears defeatist in concluding : "Neither our legislation, nor our principles can be of much aid to us in this struggle. This territory will always remain an irredentist territory and an object of discord between a great power and a small country. I do not see how we will ever be able to assimilate this population"¹⁰⁰.

Such an admission would surely have unhinged even the most confident of Belgian statesmen had it been made public. De Grand Ry was merely putting into print what many of his contemporaries were thinking. His final few words leave us in no doubt as to how precarious Belgium's position had become in the region, and carried with them a portent of future upheaval. "Fatally" he wrote, "sooner or later we will enter into conflict with the Reich"¹⁰¹.

De Grand Ry recognised that certain German irredentist organizations were primed to take full advantage of the confusion created by Belgium's botched negotiations over the marks question and what looked increasingly like the unraveling of its project of assimilation. The work of patriotic German organizations such as the *Heimabund* and the *Landwirtschaftlicher Kreisverband* were essential in maintaining cultural ties with Germany. The *Heimabund*, founded in the *Hotel Genten* in St.Vith in 1926, boasted some 450 members at the time of its inception¹⁰². Membership of the organisation could be

99. *Commissariat de District à Eupen*, 23.3.1927 (AAEB, 10.792/III, Rapport Jules de Grand Ry). 100. *Ibidem*. 101. *Commissariat de District à Eupen*, 23.3.1927 (AAEB, 10.792/III, Rapport Jules de Grand Ry). 102. BRUNO KARTHEUSER, *Les années trente à Eupen-Malmedy...*, p. 59.

gained by the payment of one franc. By 1930 its membership had risen to over 3,000¹⁰³. The *Heimatbund* presented itself as an organisation based on defending the mores and customs as well as the traditions and the mentality of the German people¹⁰⁴. But the *Heimatbund* was just one of a number of German cultural organisations dedicated to the welfare of Germans living abroad or *Auslandsdeutsche*. Many of these organisations straddled the line between cultural affirmation and political agitation. They had their genesis in the middle of the nineteenth century in territories to where significant German populations had emigrated¹⁰⁵. The ease, with which such organizations took root and indeed flourished, was addressed in a report compiled by the Belgian Foreign Ministry in 1930. The report pointed to a lack of foresight on the part of the architects of Versailles in not properly mapping out a period of economic transition for the region as had been the case with other territories ceded from Germany¹⁰⁶.

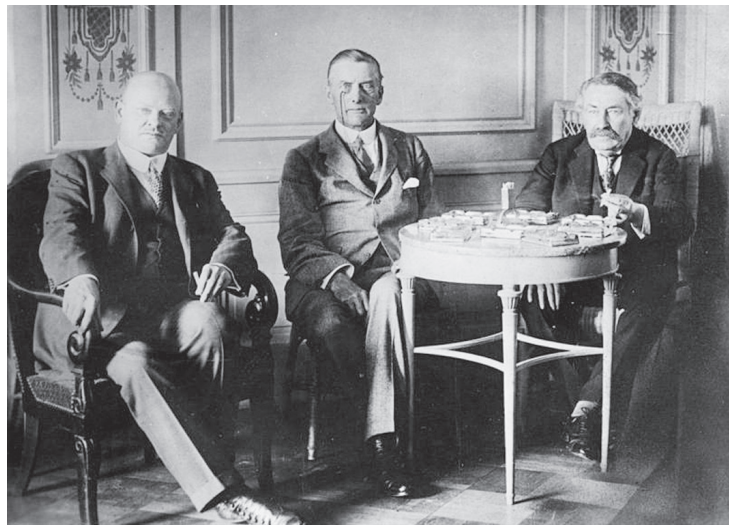
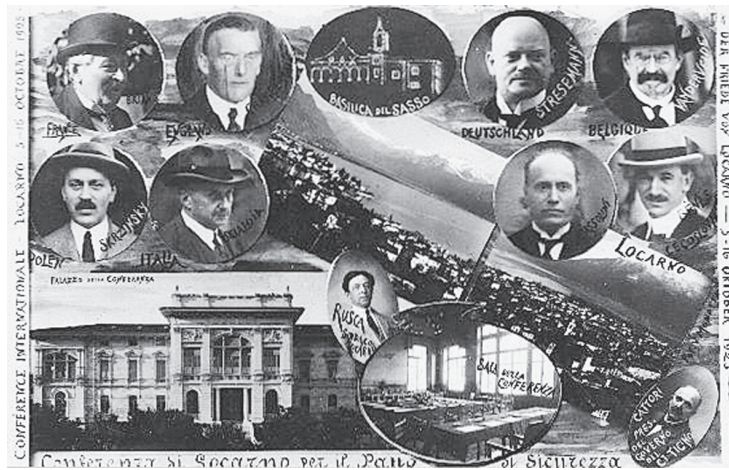
As with the aborted sale of Eupen-Malmedy to Germany in 1926, it was the prospect of economic gain which dictated Belgium's approach to the cantons in the post-Baltia period. But it was not the only consideration. Belgium's security was another. One of the

initial reasons given in support of Belgium's annexation of Eupen-Malmedy was that the territory would act as a buffer zone between "old Belgium" and Germany¹⁰⁷. However, now the realization seemed to be that this Trojan horse had brought with it more problems than it actually had solved.

The general election of 1929 again saw the Socialists receive the largest share of the vote nationally, albeit only narrowly ahead of the Catholic Party. Despite this, they would not form part of the incoming administration which was to be a coalition of the *Union catholique* and Liberals with Jaspar once again as Prime Minister. Nevertheless, in Eupen, Malmedy and St.Vith a pro-German political party the *Christliche Volkspartei* entered the fray for the first time taking more than 52 % of the votes; almost twice that of the POB and two and a half times that of the *Union Catholique*¹⁰⁸. The CVP emerged from among dissident elements within the *Union catholique* which had become disenchanted with the party's opposition to a new plebiscite. When combined with the vote for the POB in the region it meant that more than 75 % of the electorate had voted for a party advocating a new plebiscite¹⁰⁹. The result of the election, as with the communal elections of 1926, was

103. JULIUS BÖHMER, *Eupen-Malmedy-St.Vith. Ein Heimatbuch*, Eupen, 1934, p. 72-74.

104. *Gazette de la Croix*, 10.8.1926; *Ministère de la Justice to Ministère de l'Intérieure*, 25.8.1926 (AAEB, 10.792/I/33/6256). **105.** KRISTA O'DONNELL, RENATE BRIDENTHAL & NANCY REAGIN (eds.), *The Heimat abroad. The boundaries of Germanness*, Ann Arbor, 2005, p. 40-57. **106.** Note remise parPuisset, *Impériali and Jules Destrée à la commission des affaires extérieures à propos de Mlamedy* [sic] (AAEB, Classement B, D331/10). Contained in *MAE correspondence to Baron Moncheur*, 6.1919. *Receiver Sets in Belgium*, 13.4.1950, RG. 59, Central Decimal 511.553-511.55A5, f: 2, NARA. **107.** Paul Hymans, *Note LIII*, 16.4.1919 (AAEB/D331). **108.** ROGER E. DE SMET et al, *Atlas des élections...*, p. 224; *Kurzer Querschnitt über die Lage in Eupen-Malmedy* [no date but around the time of the election in May 1929] (LANRW, *Regierung Aachen Präsidialbüro und Sondergruppen*, 1655/6836/218). **109.** JOCHEN LENTZ, *Das Wahlverhalten in den Kantonen Eupen, Malmedy und St.Vith bei den Parlamentswahlen von 1925-1939*, vol. I, Eupen, 2000, p. 29-55; CHRISTOPH BRÜLL, "Eupen-Malmedy 1918-1945...", p. 10-12.



Post cards from 1925 on the occasion of the Locarno Conference, where Emile Vandervelde (upper right) represented Belgium. Above we can also see (from left to right) Briand, Chamberlain and Stresemann, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of France, Great Britain and Germany respectively. The picture below shows a seated Stresemann, Chamberlain and Briand. They would receive the Nobel Peace Prize for their work at Locarno. (Bundesarchiv)

seen by German revanchists as a definite verdict against attachment to Belgium¹¹⁰. In the legislative elections of 1932 both the POB and the CVP vote dipped, albeit slightly while the *Union catholique* experienced a resurgence. The *Union catholique's* resurrection was aided in no small way by the Bishop of Liège Monsignor Kerkhofs' pastoral letter which he ordered to be read in all of the churches throughout the border districts. The letter warned the faithful of the conduct of the 'autonomists' and the CVP.

In light of the electoral successes recorded by the CVP and pro-German candidates, a renewed attempt was made by Brussels to reorganise the administrative network in the cantons. Prohibitive measures against anti-Belgian activity were introduced and a new, "properly constructed politics" sought "through psychological means to tie the new citizens to Belgium"¹¹¹. In March one hundred *gendarmes cyclistes* were sent from Brussels to the cantons to reinforce surveillance on the border with Germany, equipped with "special armaments". The barracks in Eupen and in Malmedy received reinforcements of 76 mortars and some military vehicles. In addition weekly leave arrangements for soldiers stationed in both districts were regulated in such a way as to allow for a sufficient number of units to be available at any one time. Troops stationed in Verviers, Spa and in Liège could be sent as further reinforcements if needed¹¹². Henri Jaspar as Interior Minister believed that

in such a toxic environment it was extremely important that Brussels did not perform "the politics of the ostrich". It was obvious to Jaspar that something needed to be done about these "new Belgians who hid in the shadow of the constitution" which allowed them great freedom of movement and of expression.

There was good reason for such renewed vigour from Brussels. On 30 January 1933 the coming to power of Adolf Hitler as German Chancellor was accompanied by an increased incidence of pro-German agitation in the districts. Overt displays of Nazi paraphernalia became a regular occurrence. The Belgian authorities were forced to confront the problem of pro-German as well as pro-Nazi activities in the border region head on. A veritable "work of purification of the administrative framework was systematically pursued" by Brussels. The gendarmerie at the border received instructions to round up foreigners who had come from the other side of the border and indulged in such activities as political agitation, singing pro-Nazi songs, and wearing uniforms or insignia of a particular political persuasion. Such foreigners were to be rounded up and presented with expulsion orders, whilst the crime which they were deemed to have committed would be pursued by the courts¹¹³.

Aboard the trams from Eupen to Aachen the railway personnel began to sport the swastika symbol on their headgear. Although this was

110. *Neueste Nachrichten*, 29.5.1929; "Die Wahlen in Belgien", in *Politisches Tageblatt*, 27.5.1929. **111.** *Tableau de la politique*, p. 2 (AAEB, 10.792/III). **112.** *Ministère de la Défense to Paul Hymans*, 3.3.1933 (AAEB, 10.792/I/62). **113.** Unauthored internal memo at the *Ministère des Affaires étrangères* [No date] (AAEB, 10.792/I); *Monsieur l'Inspecteur Général de la Gendarmerie to Général Major, Commandant le Corps de Gendarmerie, Bruxelles*, 29.8.1933 (AAEB, 10.792/I).



As Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Henri Jaspar was a key figure in the negotiations with Germany on Eupen-Malmedy in the 1920s. (Cegesoma, nr. 40951)



*On 5 April 1925, the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy could participate in Belgian parliamentary elections for the first time. The young socialist candidate Marc Somerhausen became the first elected representative from the expanded district of Verviers, of which Eupen-Malmedy was now part.
(Cegesoma, nr. 164257)*

reluctantly accepted by Belgian officials as unavoidable, it was at the same time not unusual for flags bearing the swastika to be seen protruding from train carriages. The railway line from Raeren to Kalterherberg crossed German territory for a stretch of about 20kms. This had been the less than satisfactory result of torturous deliberations by the border commission set up under the Treaty of Versailles. The resulting conundrum had been a worry to the Belgian authorities. Now as tensions rose to new heights the track became an important artery for anti-Belgian activity. Passengers increasingly found themselves intimidated by Nazi activists who boarded the trains once they entered German territory. The trains were searched for anti-German newspapers and passengers were made to give the Nazi salute on demand¹¹⁴.

In Belgium, the socialists now began to distance themselves from talk of a new plebiscite with Hitler's coming to power and this disenchantment was assured following his dissolution of all political opposition parties in July 1933¹¹⁵. In the cantons themselves the party split amid the spread of Nazi fervour. The former deputy for Verviers Marc Somerhausen would later observe that from that moment Eupen-Malmedy and St.Vith "had converted to Nazism" and that from then on he had become "the *bête noire* of the pro-German community..... The Nazis didn't like me and let it show.... the climate had changed

utterly"¹¹⁶. Werson, the socialist burgomaster of Malmedy who, as a citizen of the Reich had fought for Kaiser and *Vaterland* in the Great War, and had facilitated the sending of schoolchildren to Germany on *Ferienkinder*, now no longer wished to be involved in such activities¹¹⁷.

In spite of such fervent activity Count André de Kerchove de Denterghem who had replaced Everts as Belgium's minister in Berlin was of the opinion that "since the arrival of Hitler an almost complete calm reigned between Belgium and Germany, contrasting sharply with the daily incidents and recriminations that were produced previously". In his view "this radical political modification" was due to Hitler's own desire to give a completely different direction to German foreign policy and to re-establish Germany in all its military power before proceeding to its territorial claims, in as much as they could not be settled amicably in the meantime. Kerchove de Denterghem believed that the disturbances reported in Eupen and Malmedy were of a more localised character and confined mainly to agitators in the Rhineland¹¹⁸. In spite of mounting evidence to the contrary De Kerchove believed Hitler's peaceful intentions towards Belgium to be "sincere". The true culprits behind "the so called Hitlerian propaganda in the *cantons rédimés*" needed to be unmasked and thus it was imperative that "[t]he Belgian press, so quick to attack the

114. *La Dernière Heure*, 2.8.1933. 115. IAN KERSHAW, *Hitler 1889-1936*. *Hubris*, Harmondsworth, 1998, p. 475-478. 116. Marc Somerhausen cited in ALAIN COLIGNON, "Les dix-huit jours", in FRANCIS BALACE (dir.), *Jours de guerre*, 2, Bruxelles, 1990, p. 105-113 (p. 105). 117. KATJA SCHENK, *Les mouvements de jeunesse germanophiles dans le canton d'Eupen pendant l'entre-deux-guerres* (2 vols), mém.lic. ULg, Université de Liège, 1997, [unpublished thesis]; *Le Jour*, 26-27.8.1933. 118. Count de Kerchove de Denterghem to Paul Hymans, 28.10.1933 (AAEB, 10.792/1/13273).

Third Reich, did not confuse a direct emissary of the *Führer* with a former enemy from the Centre, skillfully camouflaged *à la mode nouvelle*"¹¹⁹.

When the result of the Saar plebiscite became known in January 1935 a fresh impetus was given to claims for a new plebiscite to be held in Eupen-Malmedy. Few had expected such a definitive result where over ninety percent of the population voted for a return to Germany¹²⁰. "Nobody had ever believed the possibility of seeing such a formidable majority declare itself in favour of Hitler's Germany", wrote Belgium's minister in Berlin¹²¹. The evident acclaim with which the result was greeted throughout Germany and in Eupen was tempered by reflections in some German publications as to the lack of transparency associated with other plebiscites conducted under Versailles. Publications such as the *Germania* once again focused attention on the legitimacy of the public expression of opinion of 1920, deeming it "a farce"¹²².

The national election in Belgium the following year was very different to any that had taken place in the districts. To begin with, although the POB vote had held up nationally, in the cantons it had dropped by a third following the party's policy U-turn on the holding of a fresh

plebiscite. Furthermore the CVP disappeared as a political force with the outlawing of the *Zentrum Partei* in Germany. Many who had supported the CVP now put their energies behind a new political formation in the region, the *Heimattreue Front* or "Defence of the Homeland", which was in essence the nazification of the CVP¹²³. The *Heimattreue Front* did not contest the 1936 election and instead directed its followers to boycott the exercise and enter a "*vote blanc*" in protest. If those wasted ballots had been counted they would have amounted to more or less the same percentage of the vote as gained by the CVP in the 1932 election¹²⁴.

In the national elections of 1939 the *Heimattreue Front* took almost 46 % of the vote, the largest for any party in the region in that election¹²⁵. The Socialists were by now almost obliterated in the cantons, capturing barely 5 % of the vote. However nationally the Socialists still won over 30 % of the votes, only slightly down on their 1936 performance. Although the *Union catholique* vote in real terms evinced an increase of some 1,541 votes, its share of the vote was still more than 7 % behind that of the *Heimattreue Front*, which achieved the highest vote of any party in the three districts. Albeit in overall terms the vote for the *Heimattreue Front* was a

119. *Ibidem.* **120.** It is interesting to note that although the result was overwhelmingly in favour of a return to Germany, many of those pro-German protestors wrote "*gegen Hitler*" [against Hitler] on their ballots (JAMES KERR POLLOCK, "The Saar plebiscite", s.l., 1935, p. 282).

121. *Count de Kerchove de Denterghem to Paul Hymans*, 14.1.1935 (AAEB, 11.047/574, Légation belge). **122.** *Völkischer Beobachter*, 19.1.1935. **123.** THOMAS MÜLLER, *Zwischen Maas und Rhein. Ein nationalsozialistisches Medienprojekt im deutsch-belgischen-niederländischen Grenzgebiet*, Aachen, 1999, p. 23; HUBERT WILLEMS, *Victimes et héros de la guerre, 1940-1945. Essai historique*, Bruxelles, 1990 [unpublished], p. 55-57 (Cegesoma, A1192). **124.** ROGER E. DE SMET *et al.*, *Atlas des élections...*, p. 219-223. **125.** KLAUS PABST, "Eupen Malmedy in der belgischen Regierungs- und Parteienpolitik...", p. 415-416.

minority one, nevertheless the party vote had stabilized at around 46 %. That said the party's Nazi tendencies were enough to frighten off a number of pro-German voters who had made a clear distinction between pro-Nazi and pro-German. Furthermore the anti-Catholic ethos of the Nazi party discouraged many from embracing the movement especially in light of the anti-Nazi pronouncements of the local clergy¹²⁶.

While the invasion of Belgium in May 1940 was not wholly unexpected the rapidity of the German victory was. On 18 May Hitler declared that "The territories separated from the Reich by the Treaty of Versailles and annexed by Belgium are once again in the possession of Germany"¹²⁷. As well as Eupen-Malmedy and St.Vith on 29 May a further ten communes in the north-east of Liège in which a German patois was spoken were also annexed to the *Reich*¹²⁸. In the wake of "*la campagne de dix-huit jours*" the rest of Belgium was occupied and a military administration [*Militärverwaltung*] established in place of the Belgian government now in exile in London. Most Belgians believed that for them the war was over, and Belgium's role within the New Order a *fait accompli*. Following the tumultuous years of political and ethnic wrangling inside Belgium coupled with the imminent threat of trouble from Germany the eventual occupation was

greeted initially at least by a profound sense of relief. If at the time the German authorities had been inclined towards establishing a civil administration under King Leopold III, the vast majority of Belgians would have had little problem in supporting it¹²⁹.

However the occupation of Belgium and the annexation of the Eastern Cantons were not one and the same thing. The tight administrative structure in place in Eupen-Malmedy and St.Vith made it extremely difficult to resist the regime. But even more constraining were the primordial ties that bound many individuals to their *Vaterland*, their German heritage and their *Heimat*. In commenting on the French experience of Nazi occupation, Julian Jackson has suggested that the history of the period "should be written not in black and white, but in shades of grey"¹³⁰. In the Eastern Cantons this is equally the case. The lack of any pronouncement from the Belgian Government at the time of the annexation again made many feel that the territory had been all but conceded to Nazi Germany. The combination of historical antecedents only served to heighten the sense of confusion shared by the people of Eupen, Malmedy and St.Vith, together with the more recent episodes of the *Rückkauf* and the public expression of opinion of 1920¹³¹. In the aftermath of the war, these issues would again be painted over for the sake of political convenience.

126. CARLO LEJEUNE, *Die Säuberung*, i, p. 37-43; PETER M. QUADFLIEG, "Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen". Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Aachen, 2008, p. 32-33. 127. "Eupen-Malmedy wieder im Reich", in *Westdeutsche Wirtschafts-Zeitung*, 23.5.1940. 128. MARTIN R. SCHÄRER, *Deutsche Annexionspolitik im Westen...*, p. 168-174. 129. PAUL STRUYE, *L'évolution du sentiment public en Belgique sous l'occupation allemande*, Bruxelles, 1944, p. 18-20. 130. JULIAN JACKSON, *France, the dark years*, Oxford, 2001, p. 2-8. 131. MARTIN R. SCHÄRER, *Annexionspolitik im Westen...*, p. 71.

The Nazi annexation opened yet another transitory phase in which the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy would once again be forced to comply with the exigencies of an annexationist state. Just twenty years previously the territory had begun a difficult transition from a no man's land of confusion and uncertainty to where people were deemed in theory at least to have been assimilated into the *famille belge*. It was also a period in which the democratic pulse stopped for the people of Eupen-Malmedy. The annexation condemned all of its inhabitants not only to four difficult years of Nazi rule but to a further period of chastisement and collective culpability following the liberation of Belgium. While some 700 joined the *Wehrmacht* of their own volition a further 8,000 were forcibly conscripted¹³². Much ignorance still exists throughout Belgium as to the nuances and complexities as well as the ambiguities associated with this period of history. The sense of attachment ethnic Germans had with their former *Vaterland* was by the same token misconstrued to at once mean pro-German, anti-Belgian or pro-Nazi.

The Belgian Government officially at least refused to recognise the annexation of the Eastern Cantons as legitimate since it had been declared on 18 May while the country was still at war with Germany¹³³. However Miessen

and Cremer have shown how correspondence from the Belgian Justice Minister Janson who along with the rest of the Belgian Government had fled to London in 1940, was willing to recognise the annexation¹³⁴. After the war it was touted that the Belgian Prime Minister Hubert Pierlot had broadcasted a speech via the BBC in July 1943 while heading Belgium's government in exile and stated that "The population of Eupen-Malmedy is Belgian and will stay Belgian". However no record of the speech has ever been found¹³⁵. In this way the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy and St.Vith became the scapegoats for a nation (and particularly its government) anxious to cleanse itself of its guilt over mistakes made during the interwar years.

Commenting on the appetite for retribution throughout Belgium at the time, the *Auditorat Général* Walter Ganshof Van der Meersch, the man charged with overseeing the military tribunals, "[t]he nation wanted justice as much as it did bread. Even more than bread"¹³⁶. A general ignorance as to the nuances and ambiguities pertaining to the situation in Eupen-Malmedy ensured that those accused of collaboration with the enemy would in the end not receive justice. The dossiers opened by the *conseils de guerre* established in both Eupen and Malmedy from 1946, to try those accused of *incivisme*,

132. *Pro Justicia*, no. 350, 19.6.1946 (Cegesoma, *Documents et rapports du service de l'Auditorat général*, AA/1418/350). 133. BÉATRICE ROEH, *Les cantons de l'Est et l'annexion des territoires belges au Reich*, p. 21. 134. FREDDY CREMER & WERNER MIESSEN, *Spuren...*, p. 29. 135. MARTIN R. SCHÄRER, *Deutsche Annexionspolitik im Westen...*, p. 7. 136. WALTER GANSHOF VAN DER MEERSCH, *Réflexions sur la Répression des crimes contre la sûreté extérieure de l'État belge*, Bruxelles, 1946, p. 6; JOHN GILISSEN, *Histoire de la Répression de la collaboration avec l'ennemi 'résumé'*, 3.1984 (Cegesoma, *Documents Français Debroux concernant Belges en France et justice militaire et répression*, 1940-2000, AA 1848/68).

implicated around 25 % of the population of the Eastern Cantons. This figure was much higher than the 4.5 % figure for the greater part of Belgium¹³⁷. When I sought permission to consult the dossiers for Eupen-Malmedy which are presently in the care of Belgium's *Procureur général*, I was refused on the grounds that the material was too sensitive and not yet suitable for public consultation¹³⁸. My aim was to examine some of the transcripts in order to facilitate a better understanding of the motivations of those so called "*inciviques*". I wanted to see how, in their own words, they defended their actions, not just in terms of their Nazi 'collaboration', but also in light of the previous events of the interwar period. The dossiers relating to more than 15,000 hearings lie quarantined in a storeroom in Mons. In this archival sarcophagus lies a body of testimony which has yet to be exhumed and forensically examined. But such an endeavour must be undertaken with empathetic hands and an objective mind.

V. Conclusion

The malaise which characterised Belgium's approach to *la nouvelle Belgique* up to the mid 1930s hindered the progressive assimilation of the cantons as was evident in the rapid spread of pro-German cultural organisations and their eventual permeation by Nazi elements. The success of such organisations relied also on the exploitation

of a vulnerable population caught in the interplay of irredentist ambitions on one side and larger national aspirations on the other. The inhabitants of this borderland territory had often little option but to navigate cautiously between the two poles of conflicting national expectations. Belgium was slow in reacting to the need to reassert its authority over the new districts, but when it finally did so it seemed too little too late¹³⁹. Following the Nazi invasion of Belgium in May 1940 and its occupation, Hitler decreed that Eupen and Malmedy along with some other villages which had never before formed part of that territory were now annexed to the *Reich*. Thus began a counter phase of nation building. This was once more a period in which the democratic pulse stopped for the people of Eupen-Malmedy.

The treatment of these people from the flawed public expression of opinion to the exploitation of the young and impressionable at the hands of both Belgian and German propagandists contributed to the emergence of a confluence of conscience among the population at large. From the signing of the Versailles Treaty in 1919 the inhabitants of Eupen, Malmedy and St.Vith found themselves trapped in a twilight existence; torn between the demands of the putative mother country [*mère patrie*] and the primordial and historical ties of the *Vaterland* to which they once belonged. The

137. PIERRE MAXENCE, *Les atouts gaspillés...*, p. 55-56. 138. L. DE VIDTS, *Avocat, près la Cour Militaire délégué au parquet de la Cour d'Appel de Bruxelles*, to the Author, 12.2.2009.

139. PIERRE MAXENCE, *Les atouts gaspillés...*, p. 37-39.



German troops are welcomed in the Eastern Cantons in 1940 with Nazi flags and salutes. (Cegesoma, nr. 12768)

ease with which the Nazi annexation was eventually realised in 1940 was a consequence of this confluence of conscience where having felt abandoned by the mother country, a bewildered populace sought security and strong leadership in the arms of the *Vaterland*. In the last months of his life, Herman Baltia who once headed the Eupen-

Malmedy Government during the period of transition observed that since his departure : "[T]he Eupenoise and Malmedians, so used to waiting for directions under a German regime or being able to address a functionary during the period of transition had now been left to their own devices, with the feeling that nobody cared about them anymore"¹⁴⁰.

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Abbreviations

AA	<i>Auswärtiges Amt</i>	HC	High Commissioner (<i>Haut Commissaire</i>)
AAEB	<i>Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères de Belgique</i>	HF	<i>Heimattreue Front</i>
ADV	<i>Alldeutscher Verband</i>	IARHC	Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission
AGR	<i>Archives Générales du Royaume</i>	JO/ME	<i>Journal Officiel – Amtsblatt – Malmedy-Eupen</i>
AO	<i>Army of Occupation (Armée d'Occupation)</i>	KBR	<i>Bibliothèque Royale du Royaume de Belgique, Brussels</i>
APR	<i>Archives du Palais Royal</i>	KLM/MRA	<i>Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire</i>
BAB	<i>Bundesarchiv Berlin</i>	LANRW	<i>Landesarchiv Nordrhein Westfalen</i>
BAK	<i>Bundesarchiv Koblenz</i>	POB	<i>Parti Ouvrier Belge</i>
Bd.	<i>Band</i>	RCW	<i>Royal Club Wallon</i>
BIHG	<i>British International History Group</i>	SA	<i>Sturmabteilung</i>
Cegesoma	<i>Centre d'Études et de documentation Guerre et Sociétés contemporaines</i>	SAE	<i>Staatsarchiv Eupen</i>
CVP	<i>Christliche Volkspartei</i>	SS	<i>Schutzstaffel</i>
DKG	<i>Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft</i>	TNA	<i>The National Archives (Kew)</i>
Ét. Maj.	<i>État-Major</i>	ZBV	<i>Zur besonderen Verwendung</i>
FO	<i>Foreign Office</i>	Zgs.	<i>Zeitgeschichte</i>
GQG	<i>Grand Quartier Général</i>		

140. *Erinnerungen Baltia*, p. 32 (LANRW, *Sammlung Baltia*, RW/10/5).