

# Foreign students at Belgian universities

## A statistical and bibliographical approach

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Each year between 1876 and 1938 averagely almost 1200 foreign students were enrolled at the Belgian universities of Brussels, Ghent, Liège and Louvain. They represented more than 90 different countries and regions from every corner of the world, from Canada to Australia and from Japan to Chile. On the eve of the First World War just under 30 percent of all university students in Belgium came from abroad. At the University of Liège this proportion between foreign and Belgian students exceeded even the half. In 1912-1913 for instance, one out of four students in Liège was of Russian origin.

The increasing number of foreign students caused all kinds of difficulties, from complaints about lack of space in the lecture halls to the fear that foreigners would flood the local labour market. Already from the end of the 1830s, some professors pointed out that it should not be too easy for foreigners to establish themselves as physicians or lawyers. The resulting debate on the recognition of Belgian diplomas which were obtained by foreigners came to a head in the 1930s, and was also enlarged to an international discussion on the mutual international recognition of diplomas. France (a very popular destination among foreign students too) took the lead in this latter debate, as will be shown in the second section.

However, most of these problems which were due to a massive increase in the number of foreign students are researched only to a very limited extent. The last section will go more deeply into this, by examining the existing literature and by sketching the possibilities of primary source material available in Belgium for this kind of research. By analyzing various types of primary sources it is possible to obtain a clear picture not only of the statistical data, but also – albeit to a lesser degree – of more qualitative issues, such as the reasons why foreign students decided to visit Belgian universities and what happened to them after their studies abroad. Unfortunately the source material contends with some awkward structural lacks and limitations in terms of its contents. The amazingly scarce literature on the subject contrasts sharply with the huge amount of foreign students and the rather large collection of primary sources. Many important gaps still have to be filled and the field for new original research lies widely open.

## 1. A STATISTICAL APPROACH OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN BRUSSELS, GHENT, LIÈGE AND LOUVAIN

In recent years, historical research on student mobility received a significant boost by the creation of the international research network "Academic migrations within and to Europe" and the organisation of several international conferences (Peter, 2001; Peter & Tikhonov, 2003). In their approach, members of the network make a distinction between so-called receiving or host countries on the one hand, and countries of origin or home countries on the other hand, although they realise that many of these countries belong to both categories at the same time. Nevertheless, France, Germany, England, Belgium and Switzerland can easily be characterised as the main receiving countries, whereas the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were the most important countries of origin during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

It is essential to note a methodological difficulty connected with these three multi-ethnic realms, viz. the definition of nationality. Unfortunately, researchers are often forced to use different criteria: place of birth, nationality of the father, language or nationality stated by the students themselves in the enrolment register of the foreign university which they visited. Some students just mentioned Russia, some others were not afraid to reveal their full ethnic, geographical or national origin and used more specific place-names such as Poland, Ukraine, Finland or Lithuania (Neumann, 1987). This question becomes even trickier with regard to Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, where ethnic, national, religious and language boundaries were more diffuse and the subject of change in the decades around the turn of the century. Certainly with regard to these realms, the majority of researchers start from the situation after the First World War, retrospective to the 1870s. Although many multi-ethnic countries such as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia or Hungary remained in existence or were even created after 1919, the coincidence of nation and state was agreed upon at least as an ideological principle during the negotiations in Versailles the same year.

All numbers used in this article are based on lists in the so-called *Rapports académiques*.<sup>1</sup> In these annual reports of the universities the amount of

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<sup>1</sup> *Université libre de Bruxelles. Rapport sur l'Année académique, 1924-1937; Université de Gand. Ouverture solennelle des Cours, 1858-1937; Université de Liège. Ouverture solennelle des Cours, 1864-1937; Annuaire de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1876-1937.*

students per country is mentioned as well as the amount of students per faculty and per gender. These lists served as a base for similar, yet often much less detailed, lists in the triennial reports which were published by the government.<sup>2</sup> Only for the University of Brussels the figures of the triennial reports are used for the period between 1876 and 1924. Before then, the university did not include these figures in its *rapport académique*. Unfortunately it is not always clear which criterion is used by the university (and government) authorities at the time to determine the nationality of the student: the place of birth or the nationality stated by the student him-/herself at the registration, the place of birth as mentioned in the register for aliens, the nationality of the parents or a combination of these?

For some national groups at some universities, deviating figures which are obtained by combining different criteria exist, but even then discussion is still possible. With regard to Polish students at the University of Ghent two variant lists of revised figures can be found, one by Edward Stachurski and another one by Anik Van Acker. Whereas Stachurski (1984, 36-37) starts from "purely national criteria", such as language and place of birth, Van Acker (1984, 20) prefers to use the less disputable, but at the same time less subtle criterion of citizenship. Students coming from Lithuania for instance are considered being Russian, albeit many of them were born in Poland and spoke Polish.

Also for Polish students at the University of Louvain, revised figures are available (Bystram, 1986; Spilliaert, 1987, 84). Certainly in the first decade of the twentieth century, the figures of Casimir Bystram and Stachurski on the one hand and these from the annual reports of the universities of Louvain and Ghent on the other hand deviate significantly. For reasons which will become obvious, at that time students coming from the Polish area within the Russian empire or having Polish as their mother tongue were less inclined to reveal themselves publicly as being Polish. The official figures in Brussels and Ghent were probably based on the nationality or the city of origin stated by the student him-/herself at the registration which explains at least partly the sudden "disappearance" of Polish students around 1900. Another

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The Excel-document with all the exact figures used for this statistical analysis, together with some revealing charts, are accessible as attachments to this article on the website of the *Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* (<http://www.flwi.ugent.be/btng-rbhc/en/archives/2008-0102.html>).

<sup>2</sup> *Situation de l'enseignement supérieur donné aux frais de l'état. Rapports triennaux. Années 1876-1924*, Brussels, 1880-1928 (cf. Art, 1986).

important reason for this awkward break was simply the limited interest of the university in the precise nationality of the students.<sup>3</sup>

Although these revised figures are more reliable than these from the *rapports académiques* (because they make use of criteria which are more or less independent of the political climate of the time, such as place of birth and language), the statistical analysis is entirely based on the latter figures, mainly for reasons of comparability since similar deviating figures do not exist for all the nationalities at all the universities. However, in the tables in attachment all the available revised figures are included: Brazilian students at all four universities (Stols, 1974, 688-690), Polish (Stachurski, 1984, 10-13; Van Acker, 1984, 14-18), Bulgarian, Russian and Yugoslavian students in Ghent (Van Acker, 1984, 14-18) and Polish students in Louvain (Bystram, 1986).

The potential of Belgium to become an important receiving country for foreign students was already clear to the provisional government shortly after the independence. In the bill with regard to the reorganisation of higher education, the minister of public education stated in 1834:

"Si nous possédions des établissements où toutes les branches d'instruction supérieure fussent bien enseignés, nous aurions l'espoir d'attirer un grand nombre d'étrangers; quel pays réunit des conditions aussi avantageuses que la Belgique, si on considère sa position géographique, ses institutions libérales, le caractère sociable de ses habitants, leur langue, qui est celle de tous les hommes instruits, les moyens de vivre qui sont si agréables, sans être dispendieux?"<sup>4</sup>

At the same time the high number of universities in such a small country created the need of attracting foreign students. As an outcome of ideological and regional conflicts, four universities existed in Belgium from 1835, two state universities, in Ghent and Liège, a Catholic university in Louvain and a liberal, free university in Brussels (Dhondt, 2006). The local recruitment possibilities were too small to keep all four institutions liveable in the long term (Caestecker, Rea, De Bock, Godin & Sacco, 2007).

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<sup>3</sup> In reply to the demand of the Belgian Ministry of Home Affairs for a list of names of all the Russian students at the University of Ghent in 1905-1906, the government administrator at the university answered that he did not bother with the nationality of the students at registration (Ghent, University Archives, 4A2/4, box 114 (1905-1906), 325).

<sup>4</sup> "Extrait du projet de loi sur l'instruction publique (enseignement supérieur) présenté par le ministre de l'intérieur, avec un extrait de l'exposé des motifs, ainsi que du rapport de la commission qui a élaboré ce projet de loi", in J.B. Nothomb (ed.), *État de l'instruction supérieure en Belgique. Rapport présenté aux chambres législatives, le 6 avril 1843. Annexes à la troisième partie: gouvernement de Belgique, 1830-1835*, Brussels, 1844, p. 878.

However, it would take some decennia still before the great boom in student migrations occurred. Until about 1860, student mobility was rather limited and took place mainly among Western European universities themselves (Caron, 1993). But as soon as large-scale and long-distance student mobility was favoured by better economic conditions (from about 1850), by the improvement of transport possibilities due to the construction of an extensive railway network and by a more stable international political situation after the end of the Crimean War, Belgium became one of the leading receiving countries. Already in 1870, the Belgian universities counted 17 percent foreign students. Only a few years afterwards, from 1876, the amount of foreigners dropped drastically though, comparatively as well as in absolute numbers (cf. chart 1).<sup>5</sup>

The relative decrease was caused in the first place by the abolishment of the entrance examination for Belgian students, what resulted in a large increase in first year students. Exactly the idea that free entrance to the universities would enable them to attract more foreign students (together with more tuition fees of course) and so to improve the scientific approach of education and the international charisma of the young nation of Belgium, had been one of the arguments in 1835 to keep the entrance to the universities completely unrestricted. Also afterwards in the discussions about the entrance conditions to the university this argument returned occasionally. In practice however, it appeared that a reform of the requirements to study at the university had only very limited repercussions on the number of foreign students. The amount of Belgian students on the other hand, depended on them to a very large extent, what could result in remarkable shifts in the proportion between foreigners and Belgians after changing the entrance conditions (Dhondt, 2005; Depaepe, 1985).

The decrease in absolute numbers followed a few years after as an effect of the difficult economic situation in general in the 1880s and the agricultural depression. Besides, there are some explanatory circumstances for particular countries. In that early period most of the foreign students still came from neighbouring countries (cf. chart 2). In the Netherlands, Germany and France the home universities exerted an increasing attraction from 1876 on. In the Netherlands this was caused by a radical reform and modernisation of the educational system (Wachelder, 1992), in Germany and France mainly by a nationalistic reflex in response to the German unification wars.

Outside Europe a similar nationalistic reaction could be found, for instance in Brazil where the superiority of European studies was increasingly put into

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<sup>5</sup> The charts can be found on: <http://www.flwi.ugent.be/btng-rbhc/nl/archives/2008-0102.html> or see appendix.

question. A larger stream of Brazilian students was pulled towards the United States, the success of this country becoming more striking. Moreover, the United States got hold increasingly over the Latin American economy (Stols, 1976, 11-12). The rather large amount of Russians and Poles disappeared as a consequence of the reactionary policy of Tsar Alexander III. The autonomy of the universities was completely curtailed and the government tried to keep the students as much as possible in the own country because it feared the import of revolutionary ideas (Kassow, 1989).

From 1890, the proportion between the amount of foreign students and the total amount of students increased again by the reintroduction of stricter entrance conditions for the Belgian students, but especially by a large increase of foreigners in absolute numbers. The economic revival in particular played an important role in the widening of the recruitment area, e.g. around 1900 the first Chinese students arrived in Brussels. The gradual modernisation of the educational system in China after the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) led to the readiness to send students abroad. The Western powers, in turn, invested part of the compensation that they received from the ruling Qing dynasty for their help in crushing the Boxer Rebellion (the so-called Boxer Indemnities), in education and scholarships to educate Chinese students. This created at the same time the opportunity for western countries to influence the future leading class of China to their advantage (Soetens, 2003). Particularly because Belgium was considered a small, powerless country without imperialistic ulterior motives, it became a popular destination for Chinese students (Grauwels, 1985, 12).

The massive increase of Russian students at Western European universities from 1906 resulted largely from the revolution of 1904-1905, itself an immediate consequence of the defeat in the war against Japan. Strikes and demonstrations over the whole of Russia led to, among other changes, the withdrawal of many repressive measures against the universities so that Russian students could visit foreign institutions more easily. Due to the introduction of a *numerus clausus* in Russia and the lack of universities, the amount of Russian students in Belgium tripled in one year. The share of Polish students increased spectacularly by the school strike that started in 1905 and lasted until the First World War. In protest against higher education exclusively in Russian, the Polish youth refused to enrol at Polish universities and moved massively to foreign countries, often without revealing their proper nationality (Dutkova, 1989; Wartenweiler, 1999).

Combined with an increase in the amount of Spaniards, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Turks and Brazilians, who visited Belgium, stimulated by the industrialisation and out of suspicion against American imperialism, the

amount of foreign students reached a record level on the eve of the First World War. In 1912-1913, 282 of 1000 students in Belgium came from abroad. In Germany this figure was 83, in France 135 and in Swiss even 503 (Tikhonov, 2003, 43). The presence of foreigners began to take such proportions that occasionally complaints were uttered on too large amounts of foreign students who swamped a too big part of the financial resources, certainly because of the simultaneous growth in the number of Belgian students (Van Acker, 1984, 36). The total amount of students increased between 1900 and 1910 by almost 70%. The rooms and the laboratories became too small and the limited extension of the professorial corps was insufficient to compensate for this spectacular rise.

After the First World War, the absolute number of foreign students and the proportion with the total amount of students went up very quickly, but it got not the time to reach similar peaks as before the war. The Wall Street Crash of 1929, the following economic depression, the reinforcement of nationalism through all kinds of discriminating measures towards foreign workers, and the increasing threat of war led in the 1930s to a drastic decrease of the amount of foreign students, and to a somewhat later and smaller reduction of the amount of Belgian students. The proportion between the amount of foreign students and the total amount of students developed from less than 3% in 1918, to more than 23% in 1928 to only 12.5% in 1936. Only the University of Brussels characterized itself as a truly international university from the end of the 1920s, by attracting a large number of students from Poland, Central and South America and the Middle East.

The share of Russians, Poles, Rumanians, Bulgarians and other Eastern Europeans rose to almost 70% of the total amount of foreigners. The division of foreign students in Northern and Western Europeans, Eastern Europeans and students from the rest of the world changed radically in the period from 1876 to 1938 (cf. chart 2). Whereas between 1876 and 1880 the proportions amounted to 61%, 14% and 25% (especially South Americans), these shifted between 1906 and 1910 to 25%, 62% and 13% and between 1926 and 1930 even to 15%, 67% and 18%. The rather large amount of Brazilians at the Belgian universities between 1876 and 1880 (303) appears suddenly extremely small if it is placed next to the amount of Russians between 1906 and 1910 (3838).

Not only the composition of the student body with regard to the nationality has undergone many changes, but charts 3 and 4 show that there existed huge differences between the universities too. The historiographical reputation of Ghent (Langendries & Simon-Van Der Meersch, 1992) as the university with

the strongest international orientation holds true until the end of the 1870s, but from then it had to hand over this title to the University of Brussels for approximately a decade. From the middle of the 1890s, Ghent lost its leading position again, this time to the University of Liège. In 1910 the share of foreign students in Liège was twice as large as in Ghent, almost three times larger than in Brussels and even five times larger than in Louvain. Indeed, during the whole period the figures at the University of Louvain followed the same trend (decrease from 1876, the restoration started in Louvain only from 1900, a low point after the First World War followed by an increase until 1930), but since the absolute numbers of foreign students were significantly lower in comparison to the other universities, the fluctuations were clearly less distinct.

The *Université catholique de Louvain* recruited strikingly more foreigners from neighbouring countries. The international popularity of Louvain was depending to a large extent on its famous theological faculty and its Catholic character. Regularly, rectors and professors emphasised the respect for Catholic traditions and the exceptionally successful combination of religion and science as important pull factors.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, a large delegation from France, the Catholic Bavaria, Ireland and Italy visited this Catholic university. The large numbers of North Americans proves that the reputation of Louvain outreached the European borders by far. Moreover, to this high number of American students mentioned in the *Annuaire de l'Université catholique de Louvain*, one could add the American and other foreign (Catholic) students at the American College, an independent (missionary) seminary, yet closely connected to the university.<sup>7</sup>

The university policy was supported by many Catholic congregations who were extremely active in granting scholarships to foreign students. In 1895, the Lazarist Vincent Lebbe left to China as a missionary and when he arrived he realised that an efficient way for the Catholic Church to get more grip on China consisted in the schooling of Chinese students in Catholic universities in Western Europe. When these students returned to the home country they would set an example to others. To attract students to Louvain he established

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<sup>6</sup> Defossé (H.), "Notice sur l'Université catholique de Louvain", in *Assemblée générale des catholiques de Belgique. Première session à Malines, 18-22 août 1863*, Brussels, 1863, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> The American College in Louvain was established in 1857 as a purely missionary seminary. Throughout its whole history the College cooperated with the university, but remained independent. From the turn of the century and particularly in the interwar period, the cooperation between both became more intense, due to the establishment of a basic theological training at the College and because it had to distinguish itself from other seminaries for the training of American priests (in the United States), to assure its existence (Dick, 1998; Codd & Dick, 2007).



in 1923 the *Amitiés belgo-chinoises*, an institution whose primary task was to issue loans (Fa-Dien, 1972; Grauwels, 1985, 23-25). Two years earlier Cardinal Joseph-Désiré Mercier had taken a similar initiative for the benefit of Russian students, viz. the *Aide belge aux Russes* (Tamigneaux, 1987). In 1926 it was reformed and renamed in *Foyer universitaire slave*, which centred its attention on students from all Eastern European countries.

Of course, the financial support was not completely unselfish. Although this was never explicitly uttered, the Catholic benefactors hoped that the Confucian or Taoist Chinese, the Orthodox Russians or the Islamic Turks would put aside their own belief and open up their mind for the Catholic religion. However, certainly within the *Foyer universitaire slave* the urge to convert was rather moderate. The Russian students were even allowed to install an Orthodox chapel and consequently, the results of the Catholic Action among Russians fell short of expectations. The failure, however, had less to do with Russian aversion to Catholicism as such, than with the targets the Russian students had set for themselves (Coudenys, 2003, 519).

Indeed to a lesser extent, liberals and socialists established similar foundations in reaction to the Catholic activities. In Liège, the *Institut Dante Alighieri* was founded by a group of liberal entrepreneurs to attract Italian students, mainly from the industrial north (Turin, Milan, Genoa) to train them as engineers (Thimister, 1989). At the beginning of the 1920s, a special home for Chinese students was built at the socialist *Université du Travail* in Charleroi. The initiative proved to be very successful. In 1925, 125 Chinese received their technical training in Charleroi (Soetens, 2003, 494-495; Grauwels, 1985, 26-28). This policy of attracting specific groups of foreign students by offering them scholarships contrasted with the protectionist policy of the national government from the beginning of the twentieth century, e.g. by making foreign students no longer eligible for study grants. On the other hand, both tendencies prove the general conclusion that certainly in the interwar period, the mechanism of demand and supply, which controlled the international migration of students before, was increasingly disrupted by an active interference of the national states and other interest groups (Karady, 2005).

Anyhow, as a consequence of these sometimes conflicting initiatives of Catholics, liberals and socialists, the foreign students became involved in one of the typical struggles of Belgium in the nineteenth century, viz. the confrontation between three ideologies. However, in actual practice it appeared that most of the foreign students seemed not to be bothered about the ideological or religious disposition of their godfathers. Another consequence of this policy was the concentration of specific nationalities at

one university. Often, these students increasingly got in touch with one another what resulted in the establishment of national student societies, e.g. the *Association catholique de la jeunesse chinoises*, NaSUS (the society of Ukrainian students), and the *Kolo Polskich Studentów*. At the beginning of the twentieth century, general coordinating societies for foreign students came into existence too at several universities. Many of these societies had their own journals from which it appears that the students became involved in another typically Belgian conflict, viz. the confrontation between the French and the Dutch speaking parts (Spilliaert, 1987, 128 ff.). Because most of the foreigners preferred education in French, they took sides with the Walloon in the demonstrations in the interwar period. From 1930, this resulted in a faster decrease of the amount of foreign students in Ghent in comparison to the other universities, because courses were taught increasingly in Dutch at this Flemish university.

Whereas Louvain owed its popularity in the first place at its Catholic character, the attraction of Ghent and Liège depended largely on the existence of the *écoles spéciales*, polytechnic schools connected to the university. The choice between Ghent and Liège was chiefly inspired by the different supply of technical disciplines: arts and crafts, civil engineering and architecture in Ghent, against arts and crafts and especially mining engineering in Liège. The popularity of the Belgian schools of engineering in general (approximately 40% of the students in Ghent, among whom almost all the foreigners studied at the *écoles spéciales*) was mainly caused by the reputation of Belgium as early-industrialised country.

The Liège school of mining engineering was somewhat less attractive, but the proportion between foreign and Belgian students in Liège increased rapidly from the second half of the 1880s when some new institutes were established, such as the *Institut d'électricité Montefiore*. In his rectorial address in the year of the inauguration of the institute, rector Louis Jean Trasenster (professor at the *école des mines*) did not fail to emphasise with plenty of brio the potential force of attraction of the new electronics-institute.<sup>8</sup> Impressively soon indeed, this institution acquired a renowned international reputation, e.g. with a large delegation of Brazilian students.

Certainly the arrears of the University of Louvain can at least partly be explained by the establishment of the schools of engineering in a later stage. In Louvain the *écoles spéciales* were founded only in 1865 and the

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<sup>8</sup>. Trasenster (L.J.), "Discours prononcé, le 24 novembre 1883, par M. Trasenster, recteur de l'université de Liège, à la cérémonie d'inauguration des instituts universitaires", in J.J. Thonissen, *Situation de l'enseignement supérieur donné aux frais de l'état. Rapport triennal. Années 1883, 1884 et 1885*, Brussels, 1887, pp. 155-156.

University of Brussels was even ten years more behind in this respect. Moreover, at the private universities these schools did not receive the same financial and material support as at the state universities. Brussels and Louvain attracted foreign students in the first place because of their unique ideological character and they advertised themselves also in this way. The *Université libre de Bruxelles* presented the large amount of foreign students as an evidence of its open and free attitude.<sup>9</sup> This was definitely also one of the reasons why the more riotous, yet Catholic, Brazilians preferred to study in Brussels instead of at the University of Louvain, with its strict regime of a boarding school.

Especially because of its open character, the University of Brussels was extremely popular among Muslim (particularly in the interwar period) and Jewish students too. Complete figures are missing, but pogroms in Warsaw, Kiev and other cities within the Russian empire in 1905, caused a rush of Jewish Polish and Russian students towards Western European universities among which the University of Brussels took up an important position. By choosing their place of residence in specific areas within the city, these Jewish students contributed to a large extent to the development of real Jewish districts (Godfrind, 2005, 68-69). The increasing anti-Semitic atmosphere in Germany made that Jewish students were less inclined to enrol at German universities, in contrast to their Catholic fellow students, what again explains the comparatively low number of Polish students at the *Université catholique de Louvain* (Tikhonov, 2003, 162-163).

Similarly, the University of Brussels attracted many female students. The free university was the first to open its doors for women in 1880, Liège followed in 1881 and Ghent hosted its first female students in 1882. The more conservative University of Louvain limped behind. In this Catholic institution female students were only admitted from the 1920s (Courtois, 1987). Only 44% of the female students at the Belgian universities between 1880 and 1914 were Belgian, the others came mainly from Russia, Poland or other Eastern European countries. The great majority of them studied pharmacy, medicine or sciences (Despy-Meyer, 1986, 23-27). The Hungarian historian Victor Karady (2005, 391) links this noticeable and long-term strong representation of female international students at francophone universities (in Belgium, Switzerland and France) to the continued special status of the French language and culture as a decorative, but essential skill

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<sup>9</sup> Thiry (J.H.), "Discours d'ouverture prononcé en séance publique le 12 octobre 1874. L'esprit scientifique et la liberté d'enseignement", *Université libre de Bruxelles. Rapport sur l'Année académique, 1873-1874*, p. 21.

expected of women belonging to social elite in Central-Eastern Europe up to the end of the pre-socialist regimes.

Also the *Université nouvelle* in Brussels attracted a great deal of foreign, female students. The university started in 1894 as a split off from the *Université libre de Bruxelles*, after a conflict about the concentration of authority in the council of administration, the central governing body of the university. A group of professors reacted by the establishment of their own university, the administration of which was completely controlled by the professors themselves.<sup>10</sup> The open, democratic character of the *Université Nouvelle* appeared to be attractive to many foreign students. In 1897, 231 students were registered at the new university, 141 of whom were foreigners: 31 Russians, 54 Bulgarians and 56 Rumanians. However, the university could not grant legal degrees, what explains to a large extent its limited force of attraction on Belgian students (Despy-Meyer & Becquevort, 1980, 13).

The general reputation of Belgium as a land of freedom contributed largely to the popularity of its universities. It was experienced as a politically neutral and quiet country (especially in comparison to the neighbouring countries Germany and France immediately after 1870) with strong liberal traditions, such as freedom of opinion, freedom of press and a unique freedom of education. The list of other pull factors, mentioned by foreign students, seems inexhaustible: the strong industrial development, the high quality of technical instruction, the rare combination of Catholicism with secularisation and progress, the name and fame of the Old University of Louvain, trade relations with the home country, propaganda of Flemish missionaries, dynastic relations between the Belgian royal house and the Brazilian imperial family, the escape from military service by a study abroad, the popularity of particular professors, the rather low cost of living in Belgium in comparison to Paris and the accessibility of French as the educational language.

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<sup>10</sup> The immediate cause of the conflict was the refusal by the Conseil d'administration to permit the famous French geographer Elisée Reclus to start his intentioned course. In December 1893, an old publication of Reclus in which he defended anarchism circulated on the campus in Brussels. Shortly before, the country was startled by several anarchist attacks and therefore the council decided to postpone the assignment of Reclus. This was to great dissatisfaction of many students and professors, who reacted by the establishment of their own university. The Université Nouvelle existed until the First World War.

## 2. INCREASING FEAR OF THE GROWING NUMBER OF FOREIGN STUDENTS

Certainly in the first half of the nineteenth century, the great majority of foreign students visited Belgium only for a year for the purpose of specialisation and not to obtain a full degree. Since many of them had obtained their initial diploma abroad, the question arose if, and under which conditions these foreigners would be allowed to exercise their profession in Belgium. Already from the end of the 1830s, some professors within the *Assemblée médicale*, the predecessor of the *Académie royale de Médecine de Belgique*, had pointed out that it should not be made too easy for foreigners to practise their profession in Belgium. They had to meet the same conditions as the national applicants, so that the society could receive all the guarantees that it deserved.<sup>11</sup>

From 1835, the government could grant foreigners the permission to practise their profession in Belgium on the basis of a diploma obtained abroad. Concerning these applications the cabinet had to act on the advice of the central examining board. Due to the existence of private, independent universities (the Catholic University of Leuven and the liberal Free University of Brussels) in addition to the state universities of Liège and Ghent, it was considered impossible that the universities themselves could grant diplomas to which social rights were connected. Indeed, the government was not entitled to supervise these private universities and so could not guarantee the quality of the diplomas granted by them. Therefore independent examining boards were established with representatives of all four universities. The system turned out to be a complete failure, among other reasons because the professors favoured their own students. As a result and after long-lasting discussions, the universities regained the right to grant diplomas in 1876. It is true that the government still prescribed the examination program to a large extent and that the universities had lost much of their freedom in this respect.

Many physicians and professors at the faculty of medicine had the feeling that the central examining board granted the dispensations for foreigners to practise their profession on the basis of their foreign diploma too easily. Furthermore, this provision provoked criticism because Belgian students who

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<sup>11</sup>. Graux (P.J.) a.o., *Projet de loi destiné à régulariser l'exercice de la médecine, chirurgie, et pharmacie, en Belgique, précédé de l'exposé des motifs à l'appui de ce travail*, Brussels, 1840, p. 32.

had studied abroad were ineligible for such an arrangement. They were forced to take the whole series of legally prescribed examinations while their foreign diploma was not taken into account at all. Still, some of the professors, mainly at the state universities, agreed with the argumentation of the government. Jean Hubert Thiry, rector of the University of Liège, was afraid that otherwise too many students would be inclined to visit foreign universities which were known to grant diplomas easily, and return to Belgium afterwards.<sup>12</sup> It took until 1876 before this difference between Belgian and foreign students was lifted and studies abroad received the appreciation that they deserved.

The progressive law of 1876 abolished the system of separate examining boards and the universities regained the authority to grant the academic degrees themselves. Only one central board remained into existence with representatives of the different universities, to examine students who were not connected to any university. In addition, a new commission was established to ratify the diplomas. It had to verify firstly, if they were granted by one of the state universities, one of the private universities or the central examining board and secondly, if they were granted after examinations on the subjects and in accordance with the conditions laid down by the law.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, the new legal framework had far-reaching repercussions on the recognition of foreign diplomas. These were presented to the ratification commission and evaluated on the basis of the same criteria as these used for the ratification of the diplomas granted by the Belgian universities. Moreover, this regulation was made more stringent as a result of the fact that the government had to observe the decision of the commission in case it was negative and in case of a positive advice the cabinet received the right to oblige the applicant to take extra examinations. In this way the government took up a very clear standpoint:

"En thèse générale, ceux qui ont obtenu les diplômes légaux en Belgique, sont seuls admissibles à l'exercice des professions libérales".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Procès-verbal du conseil de perfectionnement, 29 décembre 1875", in C. Delcour (ed.), *Situation de l'enseignement supérieur donné aux frais de l'état. Rapport triennal. Années 1874, 1875 et 1876*, Brussels, 1879, p. 190.

<sup>13</sup> "Loi sur la collation des grades académiques et le programme des examens universitaires", in C. Delcour (ed.), *Situation de l'enseignement supérieur donné aux frais de l'état. Rapport triennal. Années 1874, 1875 et 1876*, Brussels, 1879, p. 295.

<sup>14</sup> Van Humbeeck (P.) (ed.), *Situation de l'enseignement supérieur donné aux frais de l'état. Rapport triennal. Années 1877, 1878 et 1879*, Brussels, 1882, p. cccv.

Foreign diplomas (irrespective of whether they were obtained by foreigners or Belgians) could only be recognised exceptionally and on the condition that they were granted after completely equivalent studies.

However, already after a few years the recognition of the diplomas by the ratification commission became a purely formal matter and little was left of a strict inspection of the degrees obtained abroad. In view of the coming amendment of the law on higher education Léon Vanderkindere, professor of history and politician in Brussels, argued successfully in favour of a reintroduction of the old system.<sup>15</sup> From 1890, the government had to follow again the unanimous opinion of the central board, who could impose additional examinations if considered necessary. Moreover, the applicants had to be subjected to an inquiry into their morality and the motivation to take up their residence in Belgium.<sup>16</sup> So the government tried to meet the question which since 1840 recurred regularly within the Royal Academy of Medicine, towards a close control on the recognition of foreign diplomas and the right to set up a medical practise.

The issue of the recognition of foreign diplomas in Belgium was gradually extended with the problem of the recognition of Belgian diplomas abroad and of Belgian diplomas obtained by foreigners who wanted to settle in Belgium. Certainly this last question heated things up because the number of foreign students increased impressively from the 1860s. In contrast to their forerunners in the first half of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of them received their entire training in Belgium. In reply, more and more politicians, professors and (medical) practitioners feared that foreigners would flood the local labour market and put aside national candidates.

William I was hardly confronted with this problem and from 1825, it was even completely inexistent since students with a foreign degree of secondary education were no longer allowed to enrol at the universities. The decree was directed in the first place against Catholics who sent their children towards rigid, ultramontane Jesuit colleges in France. With this measure the government intended to stop the influence of anti-patriotic morals and an anti-national education. In addition, the general, persistent orientation of the

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<sup>15</sup>. Vanderkindere (L.), *Rapport sur le projet de réorganisation de l'enseignement supérieur fait au nom du Conseil d'administration de l'Université de Bruxelles*, Brussels, 1887, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup>. De Burlet (J.) (ed.), *Situation de l'enseignement supérieur donné aux frais de l'état. Rapport triennal. Années 1889, 1890 et 1891*, Brussels, 1893, p. ccvi.

Southern Netherlands towards France had to be brought to a halt, as the minister of education stated in his annual report.<sup>17</sup>

Immediately, the provision met very much public protest. Among others, the libertarian bishop of Liège, Corneille van Bommel, inveighed bitterly against what he condemned as an unconstitutional stipulation. The public offices, for which one needed a university degree, were no longer open to everybody, although this was guaranteed in the constitution. The bishop compared William I even with Philip II,

"un roi absolu, dont les hommes de notre gouvernement détestent les actes et qu'ils ont qualifié du nom de tyran".<sup>18</sup>

Out of fear for the Reformation the Spanish king had prohibited students in the Southern Netherlands to study abroad. Nevertheless, he did not forbid studies abroad in general, but only at the universities in Germany and Leyden, where the new doctrines predominated. According to Van Bommel, William I's radical decision to prohibit all studies abroad was unprecedented. It was unjust, ridiculous and harmful to the scientific development. Besides, the risk existed that neighbouring countries would issue similar protectionist measures.

As a counter reaction against the closed policy of William I, the provisional Belgian government decided in 1830 to keep the reorganised universities as open as possible. The decree of 1825 was repealed, but new statutory regulations about the obtaining of Belgian degrees by foreigners did not follow. However, it is true that from 1835 a distinction was made between legal degrees (granted by independent examining boards) and scientific degrees (granted by the universities). Only those students with a legal degree in medicine or law were allowed to establish themselves as a physician, surgeon, lawyer or judge. Initially, the scientific degrees were meant to offer the universities the possibility to organise educational programs with a personal interpretation, but in practice they became increasingly intended for foreign students. Only at the end of the nineteenth century, some universities used this opportunity to introduce special courses and so to meet deficiencies in the legislation.

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<sup>17</sup>. "Rapport sur l'état des universités du royaume des Pays-Bas, pendant l'année 1827", in J.B. Nothomb (ed.), *État de l'instruction supérieure en Belgique. Rapport présenté aux chambres législatives, le 6 avril 1843. Annexes à la deuxième partie: gouvernement des Pays-Bas*, Brussels, 1844, p. 596.

<sup>18</sup>. Van Bommel (C.), *Trois chapitres sur les deux arrêtés du 20 juin 1829, relatifs au collège philosophique. Par un père de famille pétitionnaire*, Brussels, 1829, p. 49.



Until then, scientific degrees had hardly differed from legal degrees, but they did offer the advantage of being able to close the Belgian labour market to foreigners. At the same time, the difference between both was of little importance to foreign students who did return to their home country. The recognition of their Belgian diploma was out of the question and totally independent of the fact of whether it was a scientific or legal degree. Besides, in general the scientific degrees were somewhat easier to obtain because the examinations were taken by the own professors instead of by an external examining board. Directly or indirectly inspired by the Belgian example, the French, German and Italian government introduced a similar distinction at the end of the nineteenth century, with exactly the same intentions, viz. to screen off their own labour market (Manitakis, 1997).

Each year only a few scientific degrees were granted and the threat of a numerical superiority of foreigners with a Belgian diploma on the national labour market was rather exaggerated. Nevertheless, together with the discussion on the recognition of foreign degrees, it gave an important boost to the debate on the possibility of a mutual international recognition of diplomas. The first initiative in this respect came from the French Minister of Education Victor Duruy. In 1867, he installed a commission to prepare a thorough reorganisation of university and higher education in France. Extensive questionnaires with regard to all kinds of educational features were sent to the governments and universities of neighbouring countries. Some of these questions concerned the idea of an equal treatment of national diplomas, but in the end the answers were never really put to use. It appeared that the whole project served only to improve the situation of higher education in France itself.<sup>19</sup>

Twenty years later, again the initiative came from France, viz. at the *Congrès international de l'enseignement supérieur et de l'enseignement secondaire* in Paris in 1889. A separate working group was established to study the international equivalence of studies and diplomas, although only three little ambitious conclusions resulted from the discussions. Firstly, a consensus was reached on the acceptance of a certificate of secondary education as a condition of entrance to university, though in fact this confirmed only an already existing practice. Secondly, students should have the right to go abroad for (a part of) their studies. And finally the conference agreed to the following resolution:

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<sup>19</sup> Brussels, National Archives of Belgium, T015-14. Équivalence des diplômes en France et en Belgique, 1867.

"Il y a lieu d'accorder [...] l'équivalence internationale des certificats d'examen et des grades au point de vue scientifique, et comme condition de la recherche d'un grade plus élevé".<sup>20</sup>

From the very start, the working group had abandoned the idea of striving for an equal treatment of degrees to which social rights were connected (such as a degree in medicine or law). The conditions in the participating countries to obtain these degrees were far too different to imagine reaching a consensus. As a matter of fact, the three conclusions that were agreed upon were very poorly observed after the conference anyway. With regard to the Belgian situation, François Collard (professor of pedagogy in Louvain and one of the Belgian representatives at the conference in Paris) sympathised with the fear of a too easily recognition of foreign physicians, among members of the Academy of Medicine. Therefore he supported the new bill of 1890 according to which the government had to obtain again binding advice of the central examining board.<sup>21</sup>

Thirty years later the government took up a much more radical position in this regard. The law of 1929 made the right to exercise the professions dependent on Belgian secondary education or its equivalent as determined by a Central Board of Examiners. The intention of the law was explicitly to protect Belgian graduates against their colleagues of foreign nationality whose Belgian university titles were meant only for export (Caestecker, 2000, 143). In the years after, the economic integration of foreigners, who had come to Belgium to study, was further complicated by all kinds of protectionist measures, issued with the support and under pressure of the trade unions. Due to the economical crisis the immigrant was increasingly considered a threat to the Belgian workers and a cause of the high unemployment rates.

In 1933, for instance, granting a permanent residence permit was drastically reduced. An uninterrupted stay of ten years was necessary to obtain the status of privileged alien. Indeed, discussion arose between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Justice about counting also the years of study or not, but it took until after the Second World War before this power struggle was concluded at the advantage of foreign student-immigrants. In addition to these strict immigration laws, an obligatory work permit for foreigners was introduced in 1936. To hire foreign workers, employers needed the permission of the government. The idea was that

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<sup>20</sup>. Dreyfus-Brisac (E.), "Le congrès international de l'enseignement supérieur et de l'enseignement secondaire", *Revue internationale de l'Enseignement*, IX, 1889, no. 2, p. 185.

<sup>21</sup>. Collard (F.), "Le congrès international de l'enseignement supérieur et de l'enseignement secondaire à Paris", *Revue générale*, XXV, 1889, no. 50, p. 568.

foreigners could not compete with Belgian workers and that they had access only to these sections of the labour market which were shunned by Belgians (Caestecker, 2000, 200-206; Caestecker a.o., 2007).

The valuation of foreign diplomas and of diplomas taken by foreigners thus remained an extremely difficult issue throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. In fact, what it boiled down to was that foreign students were heartily welcomed, just as long as they had no intention of staying in the country concerned to work. The relative openness towards foreign students resulted in the number of foreigners becoming a matter of prestige between the different universities. From 1862, no inauguration of the academic year in Ghent passed by without the rector praising in his traditional address the international reputation of his university. Rector Joseph Fuerison explained the exceptional position of Ghent in 1871:

"La confiance qu'elle inspire va toujours en croissant [...]. Nulle part, en effet, les étudiants ne montrent plus de calme et de raison. Sans doute l'influence du milieu n'y est pas étrangère, et au contact du génie sérieux et laborieux de la Flandre, l'esprit se sent porté à la réflexion et à l'étude patiente".<sup>22</sup>

The attitude towards foreign students had a very ambiguous character. On the one hand university rectors wanted to show off with large numbers of foreign students (of course also with an eye on extra receipts), but on the other hand, pressured by trade unions, they lapsed into protectionism at the idea that some of them would stay in Belgium to work there. Especially the medical syndicates took up an extreme standpoint in this respect. Already from the beginning of the twentieth century, they accused the government of increasing the number of physicians spitefully in order to weaken their competitiveness and their material and social position (De Mayer, Dhaene, Hertecant & Velle, 1998, 173-174). Nevertheless, particularly in the nineteenth century the proclaimed fear that foreigners would flood the local labour market was out of all proportion to the actual threat. Firstly, the discussion was focussed on setting up a practise as a physician although only a small minority of the foreigners was studying at the faculty of medicine. Secondly, the market of engineers, the most popular branch of studies among the foreign students, was well protected. Until 1888, only Belgian engineers, graduated in Ghent or Liège, were allowed to work in the civil service. At the same time this was one of the reasons why the private universities established

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<sup>22</sup>. Fuerison (J.), "Coup d'œil sur le mouvement littéraire de la restauration. Les classiques et les romantiques et rapport sur la situation de l'université de Gand pendant l'année académique 1870-1871", *Université de Gand. Ouverture solennelle des Cours*, 1871, p. 29.

their *écoles spéciales* only in a later stage. Finally, the labour market was successfully protected in the 1930s by stricter immigrations laws, as mentioned before.

However, according to many professors and politicians, the proclaimed threat of an imbalance in the Belgian labour market was not the only difficulty caused by the growing number of foreign students. Certainly from the turn of the century, when the number of Belgian students started to increase rapidly too, complaints about practicalities such as lack of space and money were uttered time and again. In the same period, political disturbances with among others Russian students recurred frequently. Increasingly often, the *Maison du Peuple* in Brussels functioned as a meeting place for Russian students, who participated at socialist gatherings, which sometimes got completely out of hand (Godfrind, 2005, 83). At the Higher Institute for Commercial and Consular Sciences in Antwerp as well as at the University of Liège a small, but radical group of Zionists within the Russian-Jewish student population was opposed to a moderate majority of socialist inspired students. The government watched the confrontations between both groups closely, what resulted in a few forced deportations of politically active students (Ronin, 1993, 183-189).

In particular in German historiography these kinds of problems, certainly with Russian students, have been researched to a large extent. The massive attendance of Russians at German universities created the so-called *Ausländerfrage*, of which only one aspect concerned the fear of an imbalance in the labour market. At least as important were all kinds of disciplinary problems which explain the title of Hartmut Peters book on Russian students in Germany before the First World War: *Schnorrer, Verschwörer, Bombenwerfer?* (Peter, 2001). Many German universities were afraid of a decrease of the level of studies because of the insufficient knowledge of the German language by many Russian students and because many of them were more involved into politics than they were concerned about their studies (Drewek, 1999). With regard to the Belgian universities these and other kinds of problems caused by the large numbers of foreigners, received only very little attention as yet. Still, the large collections of primary source material available for this kind of research offer a lot of opportunities.

### 3. A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY SOURCES AND LITERATURE

The most self-evident places for gathering information on foreign students are obviously the university archives. For the statistical data, the annual reports of the universities were consulted, with their difficulties and shortcomings, as mentioned before. In spite of similar restrictions the enrolment registers form the next step in the search for the identity of the foreign students at the university concerning. Unfortunately, the only information included in these registers concerns the first and surname, place and date of birth, nationality (whatever that may mean), father's profession, branch of studies and possibly the previous university. And even then, the matriculation records of Liège and Louvain show enormous gaps. The university archives of Liège are in a pitiful state by years of poor administration and insufficient financing. Louvain on the other hand has lost the main part of its nineteenth-century archives in the fire of 1914. A reconstruction of the enrolment registers is available, but all but exhaustive.

The rather quantitative and administrative information out of the annual reports and the matriculation records should be completed in a second stage by more qualitative sources on the motives to study in Belgium, the study results, the difficulties that the foreign students experienced during their stay. In case of Brussels, Liège and Louvain these documents are, so far as they exist, incredibly diffused over different funds. In the university archives of Ghent on the other hand the situation is much easier. One of the items in the excellent structured rectorial archives concerns the "foreign students".<sup>23</sup> In an indeed unsystematic way all kinds of documents with regard to the presence of foreign students in Ghent are collected in this fund: requests for exceptions on the examination rules, letters from students to their parents in which they complain about a lack of money or language difficulties, conflicts between foreign and Belgian students, the request of some Bulgarians to introduce more practical exercises in geometry in order to design detailed maps of Bulgaria and the like. The archives of the clearly internationally oriented *Université Nouvelle* in Brussels contains rich source material easy of access too, since they offer individual files of each particular student (Despy-Meyer, 1973).

The archives of the aliens registration office can serve to verify and complete the administrative biographical data out of the enrolment registers:

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<sup>23</sup> Ghent, University Archives, 4A2/4, box 1 (1806-1837) to box 267 (1937-1938), 325.

previous place of residence, move to another university, possible marriage in Belgium, date of arrival and departure (the last one is often missing because the students fulfilled the obligation to register when they arrived, but they refrained from striking off when they returned to their home country). Occasionally the files contain letters too in which the student justifies for instance his or her stay in Belgium. Information on the certificates obtained by foreign students can not only be found in the university archives, but also in the archives of the Ministry of Education (a long time this was part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) and in the triennial reports published by the government.

Another very useful approach is via the archives of financing bodies. Many foreign students made an appeal to all kinds of funding institutions to bear the cost of their stay in Belgium. The scholarships for Chinese students coming from the Boxer Indemnities were distributed by the Chinese-Belgian Interuniversity Committee. The archives of this association, established by the government in 1927, are collected in the Belgian Institute for Higher Chinese Studies in the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels and contain among other documents 190 student files (Grauwels, 1985, 2). The archives of the Catholic foundation *Amitiés belgo-chinoises* are preserved at the *Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve* (*Ibid.*, 2). The exhaustive archives of Mercier inclusively the documents concerning the *Aide belge aux Russes* and its successor the *Foyer universitaire slave* are located in the archiepiscopal archives in Malines. Other (missionary) congregations followed the same strategy, viz. the Jesuits, the Redemptorists who were very active in the Ukraine and the Scheutists (Fierens, 1993, 126-129).

Since the largest part of the foreigners studied at the polytechnic schools and often participated actively in the student society of the concerned faculty, the alumnae journals of these faculties are an important primary source as well, together with the magazines and archival material of the societies for foreign students, which is usually available in the university archives. Sometimes one has to look a bit further away though; e.g. the journal of the Ukraine students *Obnova* (*Bjuleten' Tovarystva Ukraïns'kych Studentiv katolykiv*) published in the 1940s and 1950s is preserved in the university library of Harvard (Tatars'ky, 2001). The sometimes published ego-documents of the foreign students themselves are a last type of sources in this probably incomplete list, which demonstrates in the first place the scope of the available source material and in particular its fragmentation. Due to the very limited research on the presence of foreign students it is extremely difficult to have an idea about the material that is available in this regard. An

intensive search for and use of this kind of source material is unfortunately not in agreement to the kind of research that exists as yet.

Apart from a few exceptions, the existing literature can be separated in two sorts, each with its own opportunities and limitations, viz. mostly unpublished dissertations (Master's theses) and what one could call biographical historiography. It regards research of foreigners who started from their own experience as a student at a specific university in Belgium and enlarged it to a more general study on the presence of fellow-countrymen at the university concerning. They have the advantage to sketch a true live story and as such they are often rather primary sources than secondary literature. As a direct consequence they mostly deal with a short time period and are limited to one university.<sup>24</sup>

The largest part of the bibliography consists of dissertations written by students who used the opportunity of their stay abroad to do research on the presence of the students from that particular country in Belgium or, it is a pity, mostly only at the own home university. This concentration on one university is regrettable, but on the other hand it is also possible to defend it, if you keep the numbers from the first section at the back of your mind. Studies on Italians in Liège (Thimister, 1989), Brazilians in Ghent (Stols, 1976) or Ukrainians in Louvain (Fierens, 1993) correspond to the reality, but from this point of view a number of monographs are missing as well, e.g., on Russians in Liège, Greeks in Ghent and Irishmen in Louvain.<sup>25</sup>

Research on foreign students at the University of Brussels scarcely exists at all, just like research on specific nationalities, such as Rumanians, Turks or North Americans. Only concerning Polish students in Belgium the research is relatively progressed, although a coordinating study is missing too. Indeed, the existing literature on Poles in Louvain (Bystram, 1986; Spilliaert, 1987), Liège (Hulewicz, 1969) or Ghent (Mrozowska, 1989; Stachurski, 1984,

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<sup>24</sup>. Because I do not master Polish, nor Russian, Ukrainian or Byelorussian, I am unfortunately unable to discuss these studies more in detail.

<sup>25</sup>. With regard to Irish students in Louvain quite a lot of research has been done, yet it focuses almost exclusively on the Early Modern period. In 1607, a group of emigrated Irish Franciscan monks established a college for the education of new members for their order in the university city of Louvain. The order stayed in Louvain until 2002, when the original buildings were handed over to the Leuven Institute for Ireland in Europe which aims for a continuation of the tradition. As an exception which proves the rule, the final part of the exhibition "Lobhain 1607-2007. Ieren in Leuven – Irish in Louvain" at the Central university library in Louvain from May to August 2007 paid attention to the presence of Franciscans and other Irish (students) in Louvain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the continuous sympathy for Ireland at the *Université catholique de Louvain*.

1985) proves insufficient to explain why students preferred one university instead of another and if there were significant differences in life style, branches of studies and the like. Stephan Grauwels (1985) is the only one who compares the different universities in his dissertation on Chinese students.

Besides, it is extremely important not to limit the research to the universities, but to extend it to other institutions of higher education. Especially because most of the foreign students chose technical or agricultural disciplines, schools such as the *Université de Travail* in Charleroi, the University of Agriculture in Gembloux, or the *École Polytechnique* in Verviers, they can not be left aside. Apart from some publications on the attendance of foreign students at the Higher Institute for Commercial and Consular Sciences in Antwerp (e.g. Ronin, 1993; Bocşan & Bărbuță, 1996-1997), the research on foreigners at these kind of institutions is still in its infancy.

A completely different interesting approach, which has not been tried out yet, could be, not to start from a specific nationality but from a specific university. In that way not the presence of Polish students in Brussels, Ghent, Liège or Louvain is compared mutually, but the presence of for instance Polish, American, Russian and Italian students in Louvain. After all, certainly at the beginning of the twentieth century when mobility was still more limited, there were much more contacts between fellow students of different nationalities than between fellow countrymen at different universities. How interacted these groups mutually and with their Belgian colleagues?

The most important limitation, but at the same time the greatest merit of this kind of research as Master's theses is the mainly quantitative and inventory character of it. The easiest way to meet these deficiencies is the extension of this kind of quantitative research with a few case-studies of individual students. What were their individual reasons to come to Belgium and why to that university in particular? How did they finance their studies, how did they spend their time in Belgium, did they integrate in the local community and in what way they valorised the obtained diploma in the home country? Other research questions that have not been discussed at all concern the effects of the presence of such a large amount of students on the education at the specific faculties and on the city. How the male students in Liège did react around 1900 when there were more Russian girls enrolled than Belgians?

Whereas most of the studies on foreign students at a particular university or in a particular country examine the effects of the presence of these students at the receiving universities, a much smaller number of publications deal with the effects of the return of these students to their home country (Karady,



2005). What happened to them after their studies abroad? And what influence did their international experience have on the development of important social sectors such as education, industry or the civil service? Certainly in many South-Eastern European countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Romania and Greece) studies abroad became almost compulsory for a career in the home country from the turn of the century, and played a significant part in the formation of so-called new elites (Havránek, 1987). With a large, international research project on "Elite formation, modernization and nation building", Karady aims to meet this deficiency at least to a certain extent.

This kind of research is rather different from the above-mentioned Master's theses because it is much more labour-intensive. Searching and collecting the relevant source material ask much time and is not evident at all. Unfortunately, there are no doctoral students (yet) in Belgium who specialise in this area of research, but there are some researchers who have taken this turn and who have devoted a few articles to this subject next to their main research theme, such as Claude Soetens (2003) and Wim Coudenys (2003). The article of Coudenys resulted from his main work on Russian exiles in Belgium and also in other studies on migration history like in the research of Idesbald Goddeeris, Machteld Venken and Frank Caestecker, students sometimes come up indirectly. However, since most of them were no migrants in the real sense (they only stayed in Belgium for a short period), students are never at the centre of these inquiries (Beyers & Venken, 2006).

The limited attention for the attendance of foreign students at Belgian universities contrasts sharply with the extensive (yet diffused) collection of primary sources, but especially with the numerical weight of this group of students at the beginning of the twentieth century. What strikes most out of the statistical analysis in the first section is the importance of the (small) country of Belgium as receiving country for foreign students in general, the huge differences between the four universities with regard to the composition of the student body and the impact of international and national political developments on the student flows from abroad. The growing number of foreign students gave cause for an intensive debate on the mutual international recognition of diplomas, a debate which is still not completely finished yet, not even within the unified European market of higher education.

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APPENDIX

CHART 1: PROPORTION BETWEEN THE AMOUNT OF FOREIGN STUDENTS AND THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF STUDENTS

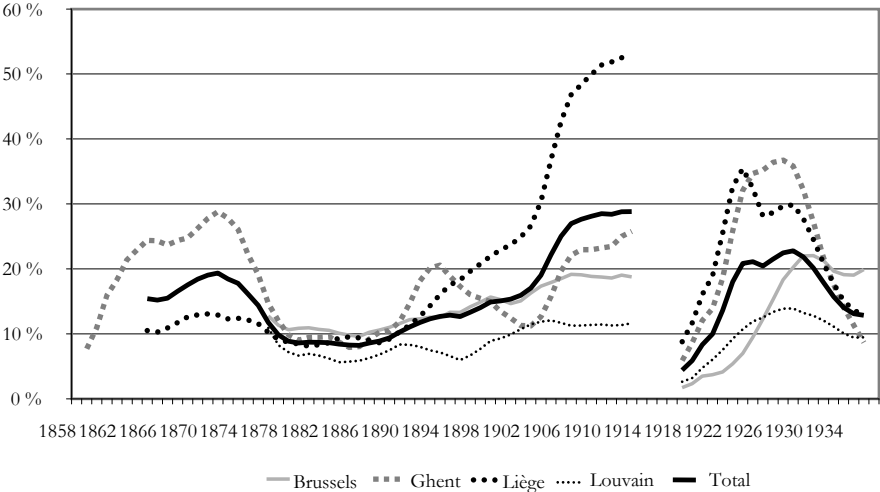




CHART 2: PARTITION OF THE FOREIGN STUDENTS IN THREE GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS OF ORIGIN

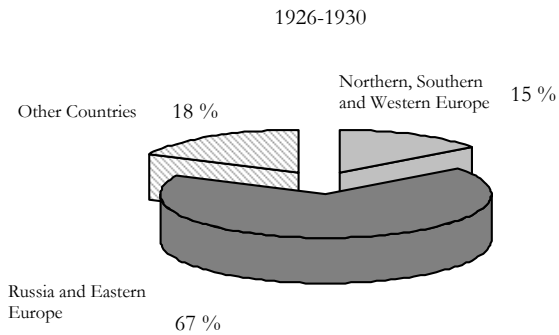
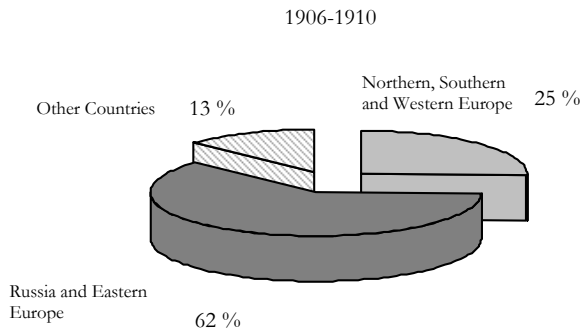
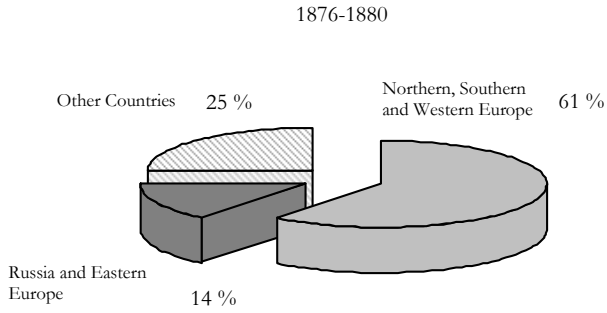


CHART 3: AVERAGE NUMBER OF FOREIGN STUDENTS AT BELGIAN UNIVERSITIES PER YEAR (FROM OUTSIDE EUROPE)

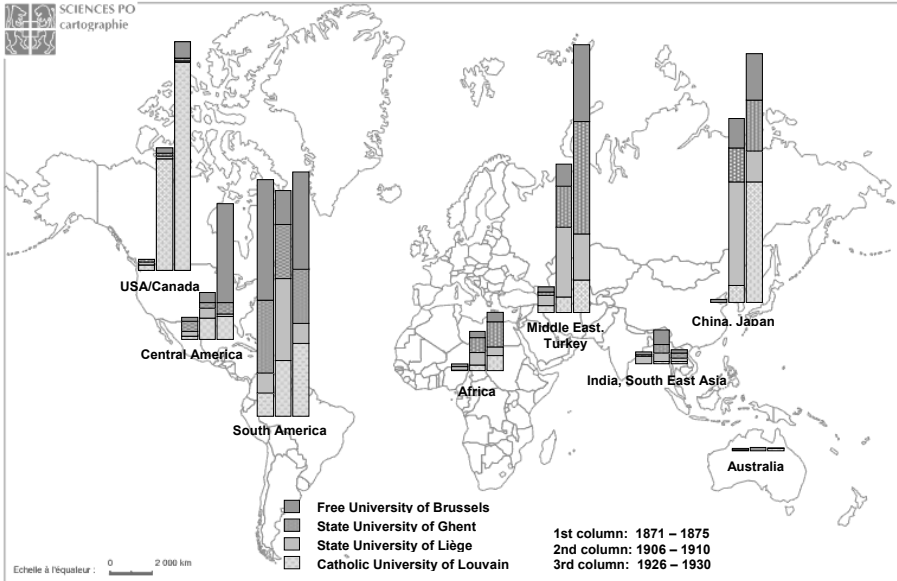


CHART 4: AVERAGE NUMBER OF FOREIGN STUDENTS AT BELGIAN UNIVERSITIES PER YEAR (FROM WITHIN EUROPE) (FROM WITHIN EUROPE)

- Free University of Brussels
- ▨ State University of Ghent
- State University of Liège
- ▨ Catholic University of Louvain

1st column: 1871 – 1875  
 2nd column: 1906 – 1910  
 3rd column: 1926 - 1930

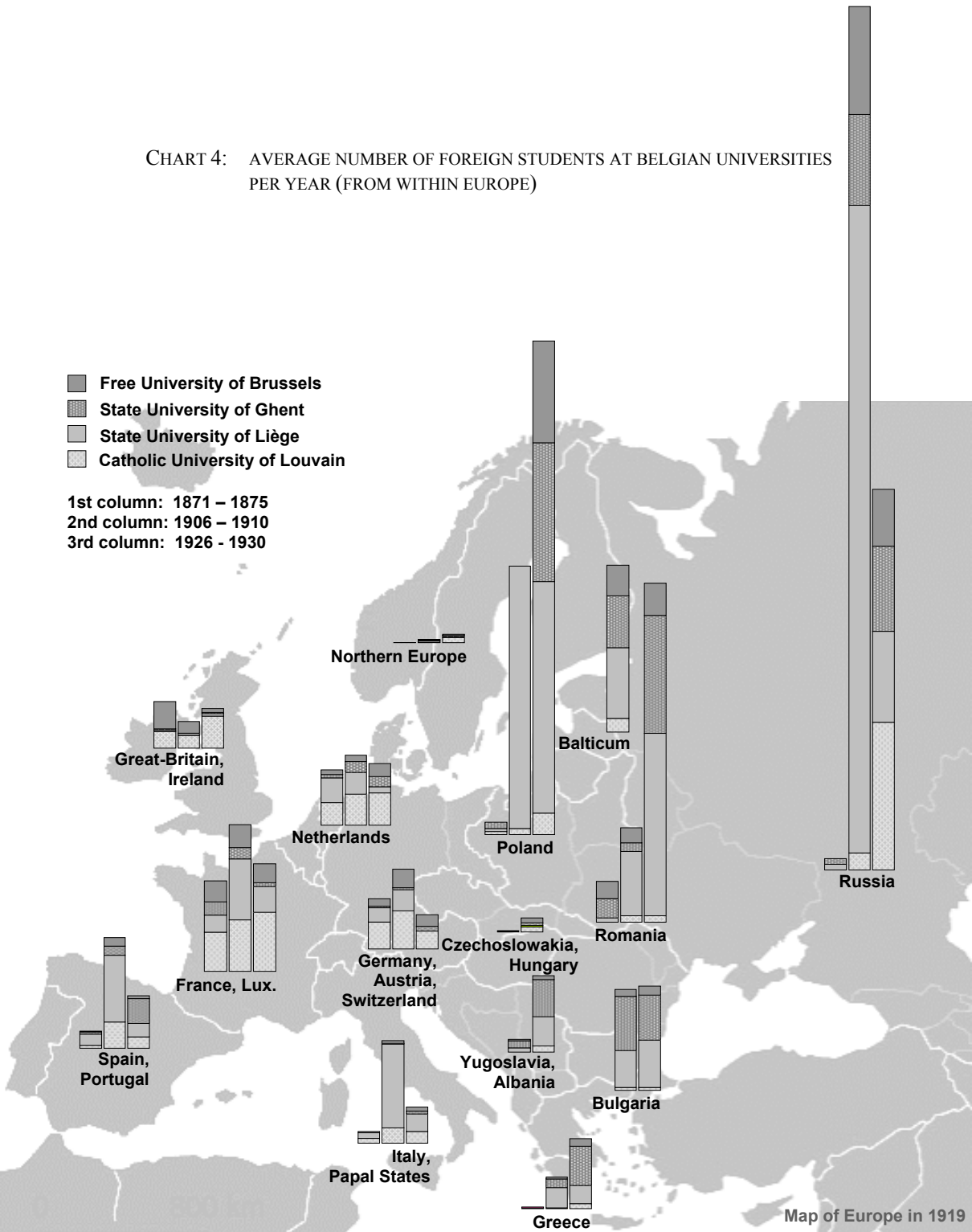


CHART 5: YEARLY AVERAGE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS PER REGION

	1876-1880	1906-1910	1926-1930
France, Luxembourg			
Louvain	37	48,8	56
Liège	16,4	57	23,6
Ghent	12,2	11	3,8
Brussels	20	21,8	18,2

	1876-1880	1906-1910	1926-1930
Netherlands			
Louvain	21,4	29,4	30,6
Liège	23,2	20,4	5,8
Ghent	3,4	10,2	9,6
Brussels	4,2	6	12

	1876-1880	1906-1910	1926-1930
Germany, Austria, Switzerland			
Louvain	25,6	36,2	17
Liège	13,6	20,2	0,4
Ghent	2	2,2	4,4
Brussels	6,6	18	11

	1876-1880	1906-1910	1926-1930
Great-Britain, Ireland			
Louvain	15,6	12,2	30,6
Liège	1,6	1,8	2,6
Ghent	1,4	0,4	1
Brussels	26	11,2	3,6

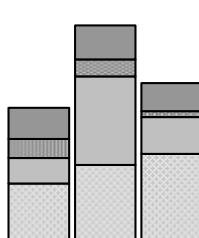
	1876-1880	1906-1910	1926-1930
Spain, Portugal			
Louvain	2,8	25,2	10,6
Liège	10,8	62,8	12,8
Ghent	1,6	9,2	23,6
Brussels	1,2	8	2,6

	1876-1880	1906-1910	1926-1930
Italy, Papal States			
Louvain	4,6	14,6	11,2
Liège	5,6	81	17,4
Ghent	0	0,8	2,4
Brussels	1,4	3	4

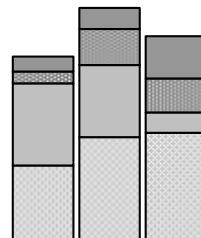
	1876-1880	1906-1910	1926-1930
Northern Europe			
Louvain	0	0,4	5
Liège	0	1,6	1
Ghent	0	0,6	1
Brussels	0,2	0,8	1,4

	1876-1880	1906-1910	1926-1930
Balticum			
Louvain	0	0	10
Liège	0	0	53
Ghent	0	0	38,8
Brussels	0	0	22,6

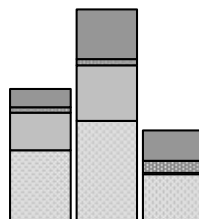
France, Luxembourg



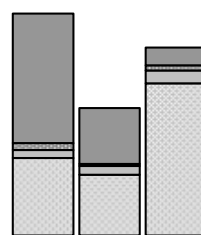
Netherlands



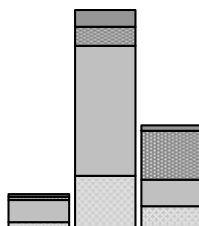
Germany, Austria, Switzerland



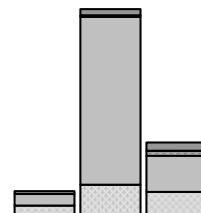
Great-Britain, Ireland



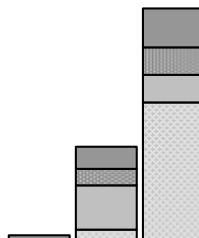
Spain, Portugal



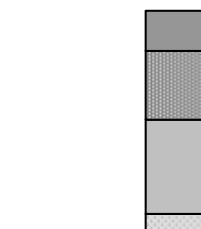
Italy, Papal States



Northern Europe



Balticum



Russia	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0	16,2	130,8
Liège	6	573,6	79,6
Ghent	4,6	81,6	77
Brussels	1	96,6	49

Poland	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	3,4	6,2	20,2
Liège	3	237	210,6
Ghent	3,6	0	124,8
Brussels	0	0	92,6

Czechoslovakia, Hungary	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0	0	4,8
Liège	0	0,4	1,4
Ghent	0	0,8	2,4
Brussels	0	0	4,6

Romania	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0	5,4	6
Liège	4,8	60	167,6
Ghent	16,4	7,6	108,2
Brussels	17	14,4	29,6

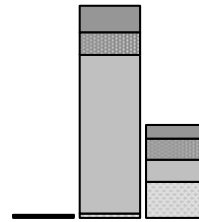
Yugoslavia, Albania	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0	0	5,8
Liège	0	4	28
Ghent	0	7	35,6
Brussels	0	1	3,4

Bulgaria	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0	3	2,6
Liège	0	35,4	46,2
Ghent	0	52,4	43,8
Brussels	0	6,8	8,6

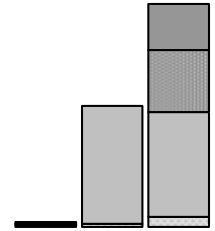
Greece	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0	0,8	4,6
Liège	0	19,4	17,6
Ghent	0,2	8	37,2
Brussels	1,4	1,6	7,2

Middle East, Turkey	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	2,2	5	10,6
Liège	3,4	23,2	15,2
Ghent	1	13,4	37,4
Brussels	1,6	7	24,8

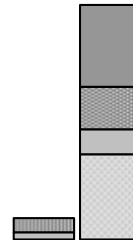
Russia



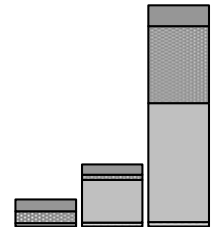
Poland



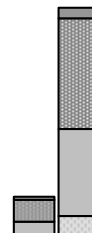
Czechoslovakia, Hungary



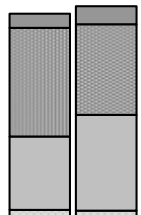
Romania



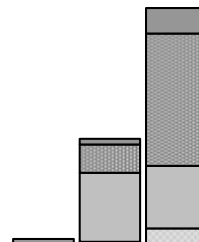
Yugoslavia, Albania



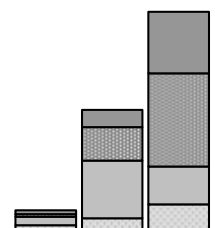
Bulgaria



Greece

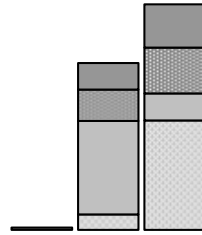


Middle East, Turkey

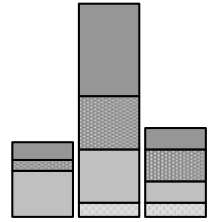


China, Japan	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0	5,6	39,6
Liège	0	33,8	9,8
Ghent	0	11,4	16,6
Brussels	0,8	9,6	15,6

China, Japan



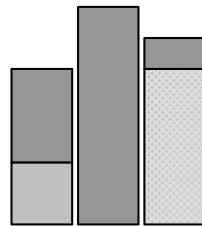
India, South-East-Asia



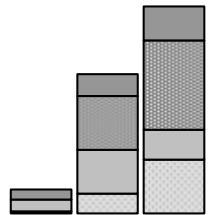
India, South-East-Asia	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0	0,8	0,8
Liège	2,6	3	1,2
Ghent	0,6	3	1,8
Brussels	1	5,2	1,2

Australia	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0	0	1
Liège	0,4	0	0
Ghent	0	0	0
Brussels	0,6	1,4	0,2

Australia



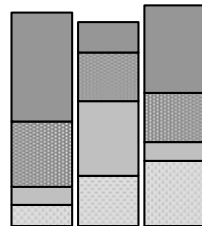
Africa



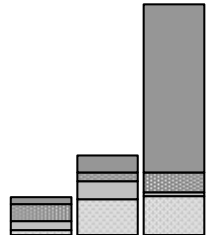
Africa	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	0,2	2	5,4
Liège	1,2	4,4	3
Ghent	0	5,4	9
Brussels	1	2,2	3,4

South America	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	7,6	18,2	23,6
Liège	6,6	27	6,8
Ghent	23,6	17,6	17,8
Brussels	39,4	11	31,6

South America



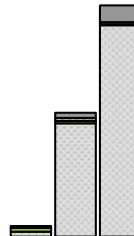
Central America



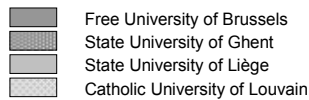
Central America	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	1	7,2	7,8
Liège	1,8	3,6	0,8
Ghent	3,4	1,8	4
Brussels	1,4	3,4	33,8

Canada, USA	<b>1876-1880</b>	<b>1906-1910</b>	<b>1926-1930</b>
Louvain	1,6	36,4	68
Liège	1,2	0,8	0,2
Ghent	0,6	1	0,8
Brussels	0	1,6	5,4

Canada, USA



between 1876 and 1880 (1st column)  
 between 1906 and 1910 (2nd column)  
 between 1926 and 1930 (3rd column)



## **Buitenlandse studenten aan Belgische universiteiten. Een statistische en bibliografische benadering**

PIETER DHONDT

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### SAMENVATTING

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Tussen 1876 en 1938 schreven zich elk jaar gemiddeld bijna 1200 buitenlandse studenten in aan de universiteiten van Brussel, Gent, Leuven en Luik. Ze kwamen uit meer dan 90 verschillende landen en regio's uit alle hoeken van de wereld, van Canada tot Australië en van Japan tot Chili. Aan de vooravond van de Eerste Wereldoorlog was net geen 30 procent van alle universiteitsstudenten in België van buitenlandse afkomst. Aan de universiteit van Luik bedroeg de verhouding tussen buitenlandse en Belgische studenten zelfs meer dan de helft. Wat vooral opvalt in de statistische analyse in de eerste paragraaf is het belang van (het kleine) België als ontvangstland voor buitenlandse studenten in het algemeen, de grote verschillen tussen de vier universiteiten met betrekking tot de samenstelling van het studentencorps en de impact van internationale en nationale politieke ontwikkelingen op de studentenstromen uit het buitenland.

Het groeiende aantal buitenlandse studenten leidde tot moeilijkheden allerhande, gaande van klachten over plaatsgebrek in de auditoria tot schrik voor een overaanbod van buitenlanders op de Belgische arbeidsmarkt. Al vanaf het einde van de jaren 1830 drongen enkele hoogleraren erop aan buitenlanders niet te gemakkelijk het recht te verlenen om hun beroep uit te oefenen. De hieruit voortvloeiende discussie over de erkenning van Belgische diploma's die werden behaald door buitenlanders werd geleidelijk uitgebreid tot een internationaal debat over de wederzijdse erkenning van diploma's. De meeste van deze problemen zijn slechts in zeer beperkte mate onderzocht. De laatste paragraaf gaat hier dieper op in door het bestaand onderzoek door te lichten en de mogelijkheden van het beschikbare primaire bronnenmateriaal te schetsen.

Het artikel wordt aangevuld met een exhaustieve bibliografie, tabellen met het aantal studenten per jaar, per land en per universiteit voor de periode tussen 1860 en 1938 en enkele veelzeggende grafieken. Al deze bijlagen zijn beschikbaar op de website van BTNG/ RBHC:

<http://www.flwi.ugent.be/btng-rbhc/nl/archives/2008-0102.html>

## **Les étudiants étrangers aux universités belges. Une approche statistique et bibliographique**

PIETER DHONDT

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### RÉSUMÉ

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Entre 1876 et 1938 s'inscrivaient chaque année en moyenne à peu près 1200 étudiants étrangers aux universités de Bruxelles, Gand, Louvain et Liège. Ils étaient originaires de plus de 90 pays différents et venaient de tous les coins du monde, du Canada à l'Australie et du Japon au Chili. À la veille de la Première Guerre mondiale, un peu moins de 30% de tous les étudiants universitaires en Belgique étaient d'origine étrangère. À l'université de Liège, le rapport entre étudiants étrangers et étudiants belges était même plus de la moitié. Dans le premier paragraphe de l'analyse statistique, trois éléments sont à mettre en évidence: l'importance de la (petite) Belgique comme pays d'accueil pour des étudiants étrangers en général, les grandes différences entre les quatre universités par rapport à la constitution du groupe d'étudiants et l'impact des développements politiques nationaux et internationaux sur les flots d'étudiants venant de pays étrangers.

Le nombre croissant d'étudiants étrangers était la cause de toutes sortes de difficultés, entre autres des plaintes sur le manque de place dans les auditoriums, la peur d'une surabondance d'étrangers sur le marché de l'emploi belge. Depuis la fin des années 1830 déjà, quelques professeurs insistaient à ne pas accorder trop facilement le droit aux étrangers d'exercer leur profession. La discussion qui s'en suivait ne portait plus seulement sur la reconnaissance des diplômes belges obtenus, mais s'étendait à un débat international sur la reconnaissance réciproque de diplômes. La plupart des problèmes mentionnés n'ont guère été étudiés. Le dernier paragraphe approfondit cette matière, en examinant à fond l'étude existante et en dressant les possibilités des sources primaires.

L'article est complété par une bibliographie exhaustive, des tableaux avec le nombre d'étudiants par année, par pays et par université pour la période entre 1860 et 1938, et quelques statistiques révélatrices. Toutes ces annexes sont disponibles sur le site web BTNG/ RBHC:

<http://www.flwi.ugent.be/btng-rbhc/fr/archives/2008-0102.html>