

Belgium, the Benelux Countries, the German Question and the Geneva Summit (July 1955)

PASCAL DELOGE

Licencié en histoire

Doctorand à l'Université Catholique Louvain-la-Neuve

The German question has been a very important matter for the Benelux countries since the beginning of the second world war. They have always done their utmost in order to be heard in the international conferences on the topic or even to participate in the implementation of the measures decided at the highest international level.

But they also realized that each of them was not strong enough to reach that aim by its own means. They have therefore managed to have a common position to be defended in front of the Big Four and have sometimes been able to influence the debate or, at least, to make the Powers more aware of their interests and fears.

My purpose here is to study their attitudes vis-à-vis the Geneva Summit (18-23 July 1955) that was organized by and for the Big Four at the eve of a first détente period in the cold war, after Stalin's death.

I propose a view of the policy pursued by three small powers (especially Belgium) on a major issue at a crucial moment of the cold war. In the historiography of the Geneva Summit, this will not explain the final result of the meeting since the Benelux countries did not participate in the event. However, something must be said on the reactions of those spectators who were deeply concerned (to some extent, more than the USA ever were) by the future of their big and sometimes invading neighbour.

Moreover, the Benelux countries often played an out of proportion with their size role thanks to strong personalities – as Paul-Henri Spaak – or thanks to their diplomatic abilities of which I intend to give some examples here.

1. 1940-1955: THE BENELUX COUNTRIES AND THE GERMAN ISSUE

The story of the relations between the Benelux countries is a long and difficult one (Regards, 1994; De Vos, 1988, 277-280). If I had to explain the origins of the complex relations that existed between Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg after the second world war, I should start this section in 1815 (Vienna Congress) and 1830: a revolution against the Dutch domination in Belgium succeeded and a Belgian independent kingdom was created thanks to the Powers' sponsorship. The Netherlands did not recognize their new neighbour before 1839 and many questions continued to poison their relations for a long time.

A recent article (B. Van Waesberghe, 1994-5) showed how difficult those relations remained in 1940, even in the presence of an imminent danger.

The second German invasion of May 1940 and the common exile of their respective governments in London till 1944 was probably a decisive experience for their future co-operation.

London was the place where Spaak (Belgium), Beyen (Netherlands) and Bech (Luxembourg) developed their personal links, exchanged ideas on the future of Europe and Germany and created the Benelux organization (1941-1944) (Grosbois, 1992). The three countries future political elites (politicians, diplomats and officials) were also formed there (Grosbois, 1995).

Belgium and Netherlands created their respective committees in order to study their future policies. They particularly focused their attention on the status of the small powers and on the organization of Europe after VE Day.

The Luxembourg ministers in London did not create any committee. But the minister of justice, J. Bech, was very interested in the results of his Belgian colleagues and sometimes worked with them.

There were also many personal contacts amongst the three countries exiled political personnel in London and in the United States.

One of the most influential Belgian officials was H. De Gruben (Gotovitch, 1982; Grosbois, 1995, 107) whose name will appear hereunder. He lived in Washington as a counsellor of the Belgian embassy. He wrote many reports as a specialist of the German issue for the Belgian committee in London. He advocated for an involvement of the small countries in a European organization that should not consist in "*a defensive line against a banished Germany*". Other characters wanted a "*long and strict hygiene*" for the Germans.

He would become a key-official (*directeur général de la politique*) of the department in Belgium after 1945 and a Belgian ambassador in Bonn in the fifties.

The Dutch "Studie-Groep Rijkens" (Grosbois, 1995, 118-120) studied the economic aspects in the international relations and the organization of the states after the war. Beyen, whose name is also useful to know here-after, was one of its two chairmen.

The group did not decide as to whether Germany should be integrated in a group of states or kept in isolation.

During the war the Benelux countries did their utmost in order to contribute to the war effort. Before the enemy was defeated, they both advocated for a sector in the British zone of the occupied Germany. They did not only want revenge or gratefully share the burden with their savers. As a consequence of their political choice of interdependence with bigger countries in order not to be attacked and occupied anymore, they thought that their interests would be taken into account if they made themselves useful to their allies. Their contribution would improve their position in the negotiations and give them the right to talk or, at least, the right to have a claim for talking (Coolsaet, 1988, 280; De Vos, 1988, 280; Sterkendries, 1988, 57-67).

The story of their political and military co-operation in the aftermath of the war is a long and stormy one. Their success was often conditioned by their co-ordination or their consciousness of their respective interests and positions.

Sometimes, they failed in doing so.

In matters of frontier rectifications, Belgium decided to claim for very token changes and so to stay aligned on the British German policy while Luxemburg and Netherlands were asking to annexe large territories and sometimes numerous inhabitants.¹

In 1948, they succeeded in participating in the London conference on the German question. For the first time, they were associated in certain discussions in matters of German policy and economy thanks to common notes to the Big Three, the French (and British) sponsorship and their membership of the Brussels pact.²

¹. The forthcoming paragraphs regroup some results of my Ph.D. on the topic: I choosed some relevant references for the present notes. Concerning the Benelux countries territorial claims in Germany see i.e. PRO, Burrows to Knatchbull-Hugessen (annexes), March 4, 1947, FO 123/617, PRO or Dean (Cabinet Office) to FO, November 11, 1948, FO 371/70568, PRO (see the brief for Lord Handerson, November 22, 1948).

². De Gruben to Foreign Affairs Ministry: rapport sur la conférence réunie à Londres du 23 février au 6 mars 1948 pour l'examen de certains problèmes allemands, March 10, 1948, 12402, MAE.

They also obtained to be kept informed of the important military governors' decisions by frequent contacts with the Big three's political advisors in Germany.³

In the early fifties, the Benelux countries refused a mere rearmament of German divisions with their divisional headquarters. They therefore sponsored the Pleven plan at first: the German units should depend on a larger European framework.

But when the conference of Paris started, they strongly defended their national sovereignties and refused every supranational element of the plan. They succeeded in transforming the project very deeply thanks to their solidarity: common attitudes were defined in meetings and documents before attending the sessions (Deloge, 1994, 632-634). It must also be realized that the Benelux countries grouped three of the six possible members of an EDC.

In 1952, they created a diplomatic committee in order to co-ordinate their foreign policies.⁴ Representatives of the three countries met there and discussed the most important problems. That permanent committee met once a month. In 1955, the Benelux countries exchanged their ideas on the East-West relations, the détente and the Geneva Summit there.

So, In 1955, there was a Benelux strategy of co-ordination in order to face their big allies more successfully at the highest level (i.e. NATO). Their big neighbour's future was one of the most disquieting problems to them and they did not want to be left out of the game altogether.

2. MARCH-JULY 1955: THE GENEVA SUMMIT

In his "Combats inachevés", Paul-Henri Spaak does not say anything about the Summit. But, he relates his meeting with Molotov during the conference that took place in San Francisco for the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Charter. Spaak was then - once again - the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Belgium. After the war, he was also the first chairman of the first session of

³ Three Powers talk on Germany. Resumed session. London April 20 - June 1, 1948. Association of the Benelux countries regarding Germany, June 1948, FO 1023/64, PRO or Office of the political adviser to the Commander in Chief, CCG (BE), Berlin, February 28, 1949, FO 1049/1878, PRO.

⁴ Comité de Coordination des Politiques (COCOPO) étrangères, 1st meeting-..., 1952, 12962, SA.

the UN Assembly in 1946 and of the Council of Europe Assembly in 1950-51. In 1957, he would become a General Secretary of the NATO until 1961.

In San Francisco, he was impressed by the change in attitude of his Russian counterpart:

"Je fus frappé par la douceur et la gentillesse de son regard de myope. Jusqu'alors, je ne l'avais entendu que dire "Niet" d'un ton désagréable ... Il voulait plaire et y réussissait ... les barrières qui se dressaient entre nous depuis si longtemps paraissaient tout à coup facile à franchir" (SPAAK, 1969, II, 104).

During the first weeks after the proposal of a conference, the Belgian Department and embassies started working and looking for any information coming from the important capitals: Washington, Moscow, London, Paris and Bonn.⁵ They were especially careful to the prominent politicians' statements at Parliament or in the press, but also to the opinions of influential political parties. The relevant quotations were synthesized in very typical documents from la Direction Générale de la Politique where the officials of the Ministry tried to define the main characters' positions towards the main aspects of the problem: Germany, security in Europe, East-West relations, atomic weapons, ... In those documents, you will generally not find any definite position of the the department: only quotations and synthetic comments.⁶

Sometimes, Belgian diplomats were able to bring information on the Big Four discussions (for example, with Germany) thanks to their good personal relations with some well informed person or because of their position in the council of an international organization. In the case of the Geneva Summit, there are some examples of their ability to collect such a report: A. De Staercke (the Belgian representative in NATO) had a conversation with Blankenhorn (21 June 55) and reported that Adenauer and Blankenhorn were likely to keep the Belgian government informed of their positions by the bilateral channel⁷; in

⁵. Parc Locmaria to Spaak, March 15, 1955 (London) or Verwilghen to Directeur Général de la Politique, March 21, 1955 (Moscow) or Carlier to Spaak, March 25, 1955 (Washington) or De Gruben to Spaak, April 14, 1955 (Bonn), or Guillaume to Spaak, May 4, 1955 (Paris),... 12910, MAE.

⁶. Direction Générale de la Politique, Vers une nouvelle conférence des Quatre, April 2, 1955, 12910, MAE or Direction Générale de la Politique, La neutralité allemande et la sécurité européenne, May 24, 1955, 12910, MAE, ...

⁷. De Staercke to Spaak, June 21, 1955, 12910, MAE.

May 55, the Belgian diplomats in London⁸ were told about what happened during the meeting of a German delegation with the Big Three and, in Paris, about the position of the Quai d'Orsay⁹ on the forthcoming conference and the possible German attitudes if the Eden plan was accepted.

On 28 April 1955, Spaak's position on the German question (in a telegram to the Belgian representative in Yugoslavia) was pessimistic. The agreement between Austria and the USSR was a big success for the latter's diplomacy. In his opinion, the main purpose of the Soviets was to influence Germany and to separate it from its Western allies. However, he wondered whether some inner and outer factors did not determine the new attitude of the USSR.

Be that as it may, he felt opposed to a united and neutral Germany. For him, it was impossible to defend Western Europe countries without the German territory, in accordance with the most classical items of the NATO forward strategy. Moreover, a united Germany with 80 million inhabitants and free from any rearmament cost would be a dangerous economic competitor.¹⁰

It must be realized that post-war Germany was an important market and source of raw materials for the traditionally exporting Benelux countries as well as a major potential economic competitor because of the raw materials of the Ruhr and its numerous and very able population. So the German issue was not only a matter of security for them but also an economic problem, especially since the German military power had been destroyed during the war.

In a press conference held a fortnight later, he stated that a general climate of detente actually existed but wanted to stop the exaggerated – according to him – optimism of many journalists: a summit could only be a first step of a long and difficult negotiation.¹¹

His concern towards the press reactions and its consequences on the western public opinion was a leitmotiv in Spaak's positions and statements in 1955. The Netherlands and Luxemburg shared that concern, as it appears from their meetings in committee.

8. Spaak to de Gruben, May 16, 1955, 12910, MAE.

9. Guillaume to Spaak, May 27, 1955, 12910, MAE.

10. Spaak to the Belgian Legation in Belgrade, April 28, 1955, 12910, MAE.

11. Compte-rendu de la conférence de presse du 13 mai 1955, May 13, 1955, 12910, MAE.

From March till the Summit, the diplomats and the civil servants of the Foreign Affairs Ministry were unanimous: the change was a merely tactical and "cosmetic" one. The fundamental purposes of the Soviet policy remained unchanged. The USSR tried to reinforce the hesitations of some members of the Western parliaments and to avoid the ratification of the Paris agreement. If a conference had to take place during the summer 1955, it would be a failure:

*"L'heure de la raison n'aura pas encore sonné au cadran de l'histoire lorsque se réunira cet été ou cet automne une conférence que la propagande soviétique et la pression des opinions publiques ne permettent plus d'éviter."*¹²

Here again, the impact of the Soviet "offensive charm" on the Western public opinion and policy comes back as a refrain. The Western Powers should have avoided such a conference if they had been able to do so and the Western politicians who advocated for top level negotiations were bitterly criticized in the diplomats' reports: i.e. A. Bevan, the "Welsh illusionist" or even Churchill;

*"Il est vrai que Sir W. Churchill lui-même avait eu l'imprudence ... de pourvoir sa garde-robe de cet accessoire passe-partout ..." (East-West top level negotiations).*¹³

The argument of the Soviet duplicity was actually not new in the Belgian reports. It was reminded each time that the USSR proposed conversations of peace since 1953. At the highest government level (in la Commission pour les Problèmes Nationaux de Défense or in la Direction Générale de la Politique of the Foreign affairs Ministry), it was reported, in accordance with a widespread opinion, that the Russians were looking for peace because of Stalin's death, because of a consequently difficult internal situation and in order to stop the West rearmament by dividing the Allies. But their goal did not change: they still wanted to rule the world.¹⁴

¹² Parc Locmaria to Spaak, April 15, 1955, 12910, MAE.

¹³ Parc Locmaria to Spaak, March 15, 1955, 12910, MAE. See also, i.e., Direction Générale de la Politique, Discours de Messieurs Molotov et Koniev au soviet suprême le 8 février 1955. Analyse des points importants, March 18, 1955, MAE: *"En réalité, Monsieur Molotov prolonge à l'égard de l'Autriche la menace qu'il agite à l'égard de l'Allemagne: après la ratification des accords de Paris, les ponts seront coupés et la signature du traité d'Etat deviendra également impossible"*.

¹⁴ See, i.e., Direction Générale de la Politique, Evolution de la politique soviétique particulièrement depuis la mort de Staline, September 3, 1953, 12505, MAE or Commission Nationale des Problèmes de Défense, June 30, 1953, MRA 38, FIV, XXIII, Musée Royal de l'Armée, Brussels. (General Goethals papers: *"Le changement de politique soviétique est tardif et fallacieux"*.)

The Belgian fears had also focused very much on the German reactions until July 1955. This mistrust towards the Germans was nothing new. In the early 50's, in Belgium, a good German is a dead one or, at least, a weak one.¹⁵ At the same period, the British officers of the Control Commission in Germany (British Element) complained of the Belgian soldiers' behaviour towards the German officials and the Belgian government – or, at least, the Minister of National Defence – tried to extend the Belgian military courts competence in order to avoid their nationals being tried by German courts (as a matter of national prestige). This was a part of a bitter negotiation between London and Brussels in December 1949.¹⁶

At the beginning of the EDC negotiation, the Belgian government refused a mere reformation of German units and from 1950 until the failure of the European Army, their main concern – with preserving the national sovereignty – was to create guarantees against a German military revival (i.e. by refusing to integrate the European Army upon the Army Corps level: the existence of German divisions was the greatest risk they accepted to take). And in front of the public and military opinions or the Parliament Members, the persons in charge had to explain again and again that Germany was rearmed because of a bigger danger: communism.

So, during the first months after the proposal of a Summit, the smallest German reaction was commented in telegrams: the press reactions and the attitude of the government towards the new Soviet policy¹⁷, the socialists position in matters of rearmament, European security and reunification¹⁸, the visit of a German delegation to London¹⁹, an interview of an influential personality, the Russian note to the German government ... and Germany became the central item of the Department views.

But, on 6 July, the Belgian ambassador in Bonn and former General Director in Brussels sent a report to Spaak. He made a synthesis of the recent German policy towards the Russian attitude. If some German members of the Parliament and journalists were tempted by a reunification at the price of the Western solidarity, the Chancellor resisted them. So, Hervé de Gruben con-

¹⁵ see Haigh to FO, May 18, 1950, FO 371/85303, PRO: *"the fear is frequently expressed that (...) Germany may once again dominate Europe"*.

¹⁶ see Rendel to Dean, December 9, 1949, FO 371/76766, PRO: *"a very strenuous and sticky negotiation"*. Concerning the jurisdiction issue, see item 2 of the document.

¹⁷ De Gruben to Spaak, April 20, 1955, 12910, MAE.

¹⁸ De Gruben to Spaak, May 11, 1955, 12910, MAE.

¹⁹ Spaak to de Gruben, May 16, 1955, 12910, MAE.

cluded his report: "*L'Allemagne n'acceptera pas le gâteau emmiellé des Moscovites*". Adenauer would keep the present line of a German solidarity with the West which would not have to rely on the future good will of Germany.²⁰

At the eve of the Summit, Spaak sent a note to the Belgian ambassadors in the NATO members' countries. It contained the final position of the Department.

The Soviet change in attitude and the consequences on the international climate could not be denied. It could be explained by an economic crisis in the USSR partly due to the weight of the military budget, a political crisis after Stalin's death, the failure of their aggressive policy during the late 40's and the early 50's thanks to the western firmness, the encircling of the Soviet territory and maybe some fears relating to the situation in Asia ... or, in a few words, by the assumed weakness of the USSR. Spaak and his department also felt that an atomic war could not be won by anyone and thought that the Soviets would be aware of it.

If so, what can be done?

No satisfactory solution could be found in Geneva. On the one hand, the Eden plan was not acceptable for the Russians since Germany was to be reunified and would join the Western bloc. On the other hand, the Russian solution meant the dismemberment of NATO. The Geneva Summit had to reach a temporary solution in order to preserve the détente. For example, an agreement between NATO and the Eastern pact in connection with increased relations between East and West.²¹

If I compare this and Spaak's here-above mentioned statement about a neutral and reunified Germany with the results of the Summit, there is a balance between the items of the equation.

After the Summit, Spaak confirmed his former statements in front of the national press and the department reassessed the international situation and the results of the Summit.²² The fundamental differences of view still existed since the Soviets did not want a reunification of Germany and the Big Three still thought that nothing could happen as long as Germany was divided in two parts. In matters of disarmament, the Soviets went on linking the classical and the nuclear weapons but the arms reductions were only a first step for the Western powers. Concerning the East-West relations, the Russians wanted

²⁰ De Gruben to Spaak, July 6, 1955, 12910, MAE.

²¹ Spaak to the Belgian ambassadors in the NATO countries, June 26, 1955, 12910, MAE.

²² *Le Soir*, July 27, 1955, 12910, MAE.

the West to stop the embargo on strategic products while the West asked to improve the commercial, cultural and tourist exchanges.²³

On 1 September, the ambassador in London replied to the note. In his opinion, nothing had changed except the Russians acted in order to reach their traditional purpose. Their goal was still a communist world and their activities in the world did not diminish.

The Western countries had to go on encouraging their public opinion to maintain the military effort for the defence of Europe though the risk of an aggression was diminishing. They had to be careful and firm; they had to protect NATO as well as the détente.²⁴

In the Belgian daily press, the assessment of the Summit was sometimes different. On 24 July 1955, the title on the front page of *Le Soir* was: "*Vers la fin de la guerre froide*". In the analysis of the event, the journalist thought that the Big Four would succeed in their mission though the positions of the negotiators were not modified: the climate was now excellent and negotiation was possible:

"Une ère de négociation s'ouvre aujourd'hui devant les grandes puissances mondiales. Le lever de rideau n'a pas seulement été majestueux par la qualité de ses acteurs. Il aura été probablement efficace. Pour la première fois, les Quatre n'abandonnent pas en désaccord total la question allemande." ²⁵

Spaak was probably very dissatisfied with the comments of the socialist *Le Peuple* on the Summit. On 18 July ²⁶, the journalist assessed the possibilities of a successful Summit as being very high. Two days later, his title of the front page was on the quick progresses of the peace in Geneva: "*A Genève, on peut voir la paix avancer 4 à 4!*" ²⁷

But, when the Summit finished, he had to recognize its results: "*Genève: Tout et rien*".²⁸ Though he explained that nothing more could really be expected after years of cold war, he went on writing that peace was now unavoidable since the procedure to reach it was arranged.

²³. Direction Générale de la Politique, Note sur la conférence de Genève, July 27, 1955, 12910, MAE.

²⁴. Parc Locmaria to Spaak, September 2, 1955, 12910, MAE.

²⁵. *Le Soir*, July 24, 1955, 1, BR.

²⁶. *Le Peuple*, July 18, 1955, 1, BR.

²⁷. *Ibid.*, July 20, 1955, 1, BR.

²⁸. *Ibid.*, July 26, 1955, 1, BR.

Before the Summit, the communist *Drapeau rouge* was never as optimistic as *Le Peuple*. He focused the articles on the way the Western countries prepared the Summit in order to provoke its failure.²⁹

With the first difficulties of the Summit, he found a confirmation of those fears and explained them by the American reluctances while the Russians went on proposing solutions.³⁰

But, on 25 July 1955, their assessment of the Summit was the most optimistic in the Belgian press: on the front page, their title was "*Accord complet à Genève*". And on 26 July, the editorialist wrote an article on what peace could bring to the people. He denied – once more – any Soviet threat against Europe. In his opinion, Belgium should now give an example to the world and diminish its military budget in favour of its social policy.³¹

L'Echo de la Bourse was the business man's newspaper. The articles on general news were very few and short. However, the Belgian industrialists and traders are traditionally interested in peace. This was confirmed in July 1955: the editorialist was satisfied by the new international climate and expressed his hope of seeing ideological concessions from both parts in order to give peace to the world.³²

However, *L'Echo de la Bourse* did not expect the Summit to change the international situation deeply: it was not possible to write a diplomatic text and to reach a solid compromise in such a short period of time.³³ Moreover, the journalist particularly mistrusted the German "hidden" observers and feared the negotiation would be enlarged to Germanies. On 20-22 July, the Germans were even supposed to be partly responsible for the difficulty of the conversations on the German question because of their strictness in matters of sovereignty.

After the Summit, *L'Echo de la Bourse* expressed some satisfaction for the improvement of the international climate and the renunciation of weapons from both adversaries.³⁴

The conservative catholic *La Libre Belgique* remained very careful and went on developing the traditional arguments on the Russian duplicity: the new

^{29.} *Le Drapeau Rouge*, July 7, 1955, 1, BR.

^{30.} *Ibid.*, July 20, 1955, 1, BR.

^{31.} *Ibid.*, July 25 and 26, 1955, 1 and 1, BR.

^{32.} *L'Echo de la Bourse*, July 10-11, 1955, 1, BR.

^{33.} *Ibid.*, July 17-18, 1955, 1.

^{34.} *Ibid.*, July 23-25, 1955, 1.

Russian frankness was more simulated than a real one.³⁵ Despite an improvement of the climate, one could not expect anything more from the Geneva Summit than limited results. At the opening of the event, *La Libre Belgique* reminded the readers that an impressive conference ("military pangerman congress") had been organized in East-Berlin in June under the chairmanship of the former nazi Paulus.³⁶

On 19 July, *La Libre Belgique* already insisted on the opposition of the arguments and positions of the negotiators and on the continuation of the traditional Soviet policy towards Germany.

At the end of the conference, the journalist checked seven points of agreement (peace, disarmament, the U.N. negotiation on that issue, the link between German and European security and the european one, the link between West Germany and NATO, East-West relations) and five points of disagreement (German reunification, nuclear or conventional disarmament, East-West relations and strategic exportations, Far East and the satellite countries).³⁷ But on 26 July, he reminded that young Germans could vote for Bulganin in the future as they did for Hitler in the past. The Russian attitude was thus a tactical one.

In the meantime, the flemish catholic *De Standaard* considered the Summit as a complete success, Eisenhower as the key-man of the conference and the cold war as being over. "*De koude oorlog is afgelopen. Grote Vier melden akkoord op alle punten*".³⁸

In his memoirs, Spaak reminds that hope:

"dans l'opinion publique, la nouvelle politique soviétique était accueillie avec joie. Les démocraties ne désirent rien tant que vivre en paix et diminuer leur effort militaire dès que cela paraît possible. La nécessité de l'Alliance atlantique était quelquefois mise en doute". (SPAAK, 1969, II, 104).

He tried to resist it in his press conferences and drew the attention of the powers on the problem as often as possible in meetings that took place at NATO level.

^{35.} *La Libre Belgique*, July 7, 1955, 6, BR ("Les Russes joueront-ils à Genève la carte anti-allemande?") and *Ibid.*, July 12, 1955, 4: "la croisade d'amabilités", "l'offensive du sourire", "la nouvelle tactique russe", ...

^{36.} *Ibid.*, July 16, 1955, 3.

^{37.} *Ibid.*, July 25, 1955, 3.

^{38.} *De Standaard*, July 24, 1955, 1, BR: "*De koude oorlog is afgelopen*" (the cold war is over).

According to a report from the Belgian embassy in Luxembourg, the Foreign Affairs Minister of the Grand Duchy lost a lot of his enthusiasm after the failure of the EDC.³⁹

As soon as the Russian policy had been studied by Western diplomats, Bech stated that the Soviet will was not sincere. In his opinion, they only wanted to avoid Western rearmament and succeeded far too well in their enterprise.

However, he went to Moscow at the invitation of the USSR government in order to free his fellow countrymen retained there from the war. But he did not attend the United Nations meetings on the topic. At the NATO and BENELUX level, he did not say anything in the meetings. In front of the Christian party in Luxembourg, he considered the atomic bomb as the only way to maintain peace.⁴⁰

Before the Summit, the catholic *Luxemburger Wort* remained neutral in his comments. However, he stated the optimism of the characters.

During the conference, the difficulties on Germany did not induce the journalist to doubt as to whether the Summit would be a success or not. When it was finished, he tilted on the newly born Geneva spirit and quoted Dulles' statement on the improvement of the East-West relations: "*Die Beziehungen zwischen den Westen und der Sowjetunion seien etwas besser geworden*".⁴¹ His attitude may be considered as careful and moderate.

In the Netherlands as in Belgium, the documents of the first weeks after the proposal of a summit are about the reactions to the proposal in the world⁴² and, especially in the more concerned countries: the telegrams and reports from the embassies were focused on the press articles, the prominent politicians' statements, the reactions of the parliaments ...

In the opinion of the Dutch Department⁴³, the issue on the cold war in Europe found its origin in Germany and in the balance of the forces around a dividing line that was a consequence of the second world war and of the evolution of the relations between the Big allies after the war. So, the fight for Germany had become a major purpose for both the blocs' policies. Since the best part of

³⁹. Poswick to Spaak, January 2, 1956, 12681, MAE.

⁴⁰. Poswick to Spaak, March 9, 1955, 12681, MAE.

⁴¹. *Luxemburger Wort*, July 27, 1955, 1, BR.

⁴². i.e. Dutch embassy in Moscow to MBZ, March 29, 1955, Code 9: 1955-64- 06794, MBZ.

⁴³. *Onderhandelingen van de vier Grote Mogenheden*, April 5, 1955, Code 9: 1955-64-PV/VN: Switzerland, MBZ

the country –the Ruhr – had fallen in the Western camp, the Soviet's main purpose was to neutralize Germany in order to suppress the advantage of a West Germany helping the enemy, even at the price of the Eastern part of Germany. In such a situation, the organization of elections in Germany could lead to the creation of a friendly government.

The attempts to exchange notes and to organize new conferences had failed so far because of three Western conditions: free elections under international control, freedom for the new government in matters of international relations and a genuine German force. If the USSR had accepted, they would have lost East Germany for nothing in return. The new situation would have consisted in a return to the situation of 1945 and the loss of the war gains.

In their minds, the Paris agreement concerning Germany created a new situation and forced the Russian government to negotiate in order to avoid the rearmament of Germany and the return of the country to sovereignty within the Western camp. The main question in Geneva would then be the German one.

There were two theoretical possibilities: the reunification of Germany or a temporary agreement on a divided Germany. The first one was impossible because it meant the organization of free elections on the Western pattern –to be conceded by the East – and the neutralization of a reunified Germany – to be allowed by the West. The Dutch department also assumed that this could happen only at the price of a more general agreement on the balance of the forces in Europe with consequences on the western forward strategy in which the West needed to control the West German territory in order to stop a Soviet military attack and to avoid the industries of the Ruhr contributing to a Soviet offensive. No acceptable solution for both camps could be found in that approach.

The second possibility seemed more satisfactory at first. Military neutralization – though difficult to reach – would be sufficient. The question of free elections would be avoided as well as the economic expectations of the Soviets. Those problems could find their solution at the bilateral level and the equilibrium would be maintained.

But the political risks remained: what could a future sovereign Germany decide? The Dutch officials, like their Belgian counterparts, did not entirely trust Germany in the future. Moreover, the actual neutralization of Germany would never accept to be rearmed and not reunified since the German public opinion wanted reunification as a major political goal and since the German rearmament had been problematic in the early 50's. The recognition of East Germany by the West was also problematic.

In conclusion, the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs thought that nothing could come out of the Summit except a détente and an improvement of the international climate.

But, in their opinion, the West had nothing to gain by giving up the advantages of the Paris agreement.⁴⁴ Here again, the comparison between their expectations towards the Summit and its results allows us to conclude that the final statement of the Geneva conversations was actually satisfactory to them.

On 26 July 1955, the Dutch department wrote a memorandum containing a first assessment of the Summit. The Russians conceded something with the link between the reunification and European security but their position remained basically unchanged and their fundamental purposes as well. The tactics of the USSR became clearer and their fundamental purposes as well. If something was possible, it should concern the exchanges between the East and the West and a cultural offensive should be expected.⁴⁵

On 12 August ⁴⁶, they developed their arguments and informed their embassies. According to the capitals, the Soviet good will appeared in Geneva and everyone should be glad. But the fundamental Soviet purposes did not deeply change. Their fears of an atomic war, the traditional leninist ideology of avoiding wars, the expected economic advantages of peace, the inner unstable situation after Stalin's death, and the necessity to reorganize the situation in Germany after the Paris agreement obliged the USSR to negotiate.

The Summit failed to work out solutions for every important matters except procedure.

Nobody might however expect anything better in October. The Western public opinions had to be warned against the desire to disarm. In Germany, a reunification would be the first political aim in the future and their main fear would be to see the Allies to find an agreement at the expense of German unity. The German solidarity with the West should be reinforced while USSR was lagging behind but remained the main preoccupation for the West in the future.

⁴⁴. *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁵. DEU/OE to Chief DEU, July 26, 1955, Code 9: 1955-64- Geheim stukken 913.50./MBZ.

⁴⁶. MBZ to the dutch general consul in Antwerp, August 12, 1955, 12910, MAE (and Code 1955-64-GS 913.50, MBZ: "*De Vier mogenhedenconferentie te Genève*").

The Dutch press was careful when not sceptical or sarcastic.

Het Parool remained softly optimistic in his titles and comments till the end of the Summit. On 19 July ⁴⁷, the Dutch newspaper considered the high price asked by Bulganin for détente and a solution in German matters though the general atmosphere of the Summit was very good.

Het Parool assessed the results of the conversations when the Big Four left Geneva⁴⁸: nothing better should ever have been expected. The risk of war was diminished and the international climate improved: "*Oorlogsgevaar na Genève verminderd*".⁴⁹

Vrij Nederland adopted a more aggressive and sceptical line towards the ones who hoped something better.

In his opinion, a smile would never bring any solution and the Geneva Summit would be the grave of many dreams and illusions: "*Vrolijk glimlachen! Dat wekt vertrouwen en verplicht tot niets*".⁵⁰ The German question in particular could not find a solution that would be satisfactory for everyone. At the end of July, they also quoted J.F. Dulles "*het oorlogsgevaar is verminderd*" but added: "*Russen zoeken tijdwinst*".⁵¹

The editorial of the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* also concluded with scepticism at the eve of the meeting. The Western firmness towards the USSR explained the German solidarity with the West and the present discussions with the East. It was difficult to know whether the new soviet attitude was due to their weakness or not. Anyway, no peaceful and quiet future was possible for the West as long as an Eastern bloc existed, even with a weakened USSR.⁵²

Nothing important could be expected from the Summit in such a short period of time.

They confirmed their opinion during the conversations: "*Duitsland vereniging is niet actueel voor de Russen*".⁵³

From the beginning, the *Haagse Post* appeared to be very doubtful as to the Russians intentions: "*Echt of manoeuvre*".⁵⁴

⁴⁷. *Het Parool*, July 19, 1955, 1, BR.

⁴⁸. *Ibid.*, July 25, 1955, 1 and 3.

⁴⁹. *Ibid.*, July 27, 1955, 1: the journalist actually quote JF Dulles.

⁵⁰. *Vrij Nederland*, July 16, 1955, 1, BR: "*Dromen en teleurstellingen*".

⁵¹. *Ibid.*, July 30, 1955, 2: "*Duitsland: Russen zoeken tijdwinst*".

⁵². *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, July 16, 1955, 1, BR.

⁵³. *Ibid.*, July 20, 1955, 1: "*Duitsland hereniging is niet actueel voor de Russen*".

⁵⁴. *Haagse Post*, July 2, 1955, 1, BR.

In their opinion, W. Semjonow was the most typical member of the Soviet delegation because he advocated for a Germany that should be a buffer state between East and West.⁵⁵ They concluded that: 1°) no-one accepted the risk of a nuclear war, 2°) the proposals of disarmament were propaganda, 3°) there was no possible compromise between the Communists and democracies, 4°) some people in the West fed strong illusions, 5°) it was now clear that the Russians merely wanted to torpedo the western co-operation, 6°) their smiling attempt of doing it failed.⁵⁶

The *Haagse Post* was also dissatisfied with the consultation of the small western countries: "*de kleinere westelijke landen zijn, min of meer, geconsulteerd*".⁵⁷

De Nieuwe Eeuw even titled on the Big Four who "*Conferentie der afwezigen: toppen zonder top spraken over ons zonder ons*"⁵⁸ The christian newspaper, like the *Haagse Post*, was also very sarcastic concerning Adenauer's vacation time in Switzerland.⁵⁹

There was no deep coordination between the Benelux countries: no genuine conversation on the Summit, no common position on the problems, no memorandum or statement for the Big Four or even for the Big Three.

However, there was a Foreign Policies Coordination Committee that was created in 1952 where representatives of the three countries used to meet and speak of the problems of the moment: the U.N. discussions, the rectifications of the German frontiers, the settlement of their problems in matters of common rivers, ...

On 4 March and 22 April (21st and 22nd meeting of the Committee)⁶⁰, the East-West relations were one of the points to be studied. The meetings confirmed their identity of views: both countries were sceptical as to the USSR's intention and agreed that nothing might weaken NATO and Western solidarity.⁶¹

⁵⁵. Ibid., July 23, 1955, 1 and 3.

⁵⁶. Ibid., July 30, 1955, 1.

⁵⁷. Ibid., July 16, 1955, 3: "*Conferentie zonder beslissingen. Waar praten Grote Vier over?*"; "*De kleinere Westelijke landen zijn, min of meer, geconsulteerd*".

⁵⁸. *De Nieuwe Eeuw*, July 23, 1955, 1, BR: "*Conferentie der afwezigen: toppen zonder top spraken over ons zonder ons*".

⁵⁹. Ibid., July 30, 1955, 1.

⁶⁰. Comité de Coordination des Politiques étrangères, 21st and 22nd meeting, March 4 and April 22, 1955, 12962, SA.

⁶¹. Graeffe to Spaak, February 7, 1955, 12683, MAE.

So, they advocated for the Western unity at the NATO level, especially by Spaak's mouth. If they succeeded in their pleading, they could hope not to be entirely driven out of the game by the Big powers amongst the NATO members. NATO should become "*an instrument of political cooperation*" and their privileged tribune for sharing their concern.

During a meeting, on 16 June, the Belgian ambassador to NATO - A. De Staercke - asked for a meeting at ministers' level ⁶² in order, he said, to show Western unity. He was sponsored by the Italian delegate but not by the others and especially not by the Dutch delegate though, according to the report of De Staercke, the Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs (Beyen) was in favour of the proposal.

The meeting finally took place in Paris on 16 July⁶³. Spaak started his talk by pressing the other members of the meeting, especially the Big Three, to reinforce the links within the NATO thanks to a regular consultation of all members of the Alliance.

Then he reminded the audience that, in his opinion, nothing important could be expected in the short term. However, the Western powers had to be very careful of the consequences of the new Russian policy in their public opinions. The West should never appear as being less motivated with the German reunification than the USSR in order to reassure the Germans and to keep them in the right camp, but not whatever the cost might be. Concerning security, he did not see anything better than NATO. If an arrangement with the Eastern organization had to take place, NATO as a whole -and not only the Big Three - should sign it in order (he said) to reinforce the picture of united western powers. In front of public opinion, the West could not let the USSR appear as being more ready to disarm. The negotiator should be firm but not hostile.

Beyen approved Spaak's comments and Bech kept silent.

3. FROM THE SUMMIT TO THE CONFERENCE

The Benelux countries met in October 1955. The Foreign Policies co-ordination Committee was asked by the Dutch delegation to exchange views on sending Benelux observers to Geneva. According to the report of the meeting, the example came from Italy. Moreover, Stikker attended the Summit in July for

⁶². Papeians de Morchoven to Spaak, June 16, 1955, 18298 VI 3, MAE.

⁶³. De Staercke to Spaak, July 18, 1955, 12910, MAE.

the Netherlands as well as De Staercke for Belgium.

It was decided to give up that idea in order not to allow the USSR to ask the same advantage for its satellites and not to weaken the western solidarity.⁶⁴

Both countries remained sceptical as to whether the forthcoming conference in Geneva could be successful: the matters of security were far too vital to allow concessions.

The Netherlands representatives still feared a future reunified Germany with a chancellor who would be less sure than Adenauer from the Western solidarity viewpoint.

In the Belgian Foreign Affairs Ministry, it was considered that the West had no interest in a German reunification. A new German bloc between the two blocs of the cold war would be positioned as a referee in Europe and the question of its eastern frontier would remain unsolved.⁶⁵

The enemy was still the USSR, even if its policy became less aggressive than before. In December, the Benelux countries agreed – once more – that the effort against communism might not be weakened. The communist influence in the unions was as strong as ever: the cold war also took place on the economic and social tops.⁶⁶

In September, Spaak was one of the international characters who were interviewed by *Newsweek* on Soviet sincerity and a possible disarmament.⁶⁷ He did not consider that the Russians gave up their communist ambitions in the world though they feared the war as well as the West. Their change in attitude was due to the Western organization that nothing could damage, even disarmament. Of course, he did not deny the necessity of accepting any reasonable proposal though he was probably not convinced such a proposal could exist at the moment.

⁶⁴. CoCoPo, 25th meeting, October 18, 1955, 12971, SA.

⁶⁵. Parc Locmaria to Spaak, September 17, 1955, 12910, MAE. In Parc Locmaria to Spaak, October 11, 1955, 12910, MAE: the Belgian diplomat in London said his sources on the Big Three projects were British experts.

⁶⁶. CoCoPo, 26th meeting, item 7, December 2, 1955, 12971, SA.

⁶⁷. *Newsweek*, September 19, 1955, 12910, MAE: "Newsweek polls these statemen on the red mood": Faure, Segni, Spaak, Reynaud, Monnet, Morrisson.

The Foreign Policies Co-ordination Committee also studied the political co-operation that started at the NATO level in July. They wished the ministers' council would become a place where every member could acknowledge his viewpoints in matters of political co-operation and not only on purely "atlanticist" questions. This was of course a continuation of their small powers policy.⁶⁸

In a few words ...

From the early fifties till the Geneva Summit and conference, the Benelux countries – governments and public opinions – attitude consisted in an equilibrium between three major elements: the former enemy (1° Germany), the present enemy (2° USSR) and the so-called "Gods" (3° The big powers)

1° Since the war, the Benelux countries have feared the future German attitude: what could a rearmed and sovereign Germany decide? How could they guarantee their economic interests in front of such an economic competitor? They also did not see any interest for Europe and the West in reunifying Germany.

2° From the early fifties, the Benelux countries always received the Russian invitations to negotiate with scepticism. They were especially doubtful as to whether the Russians were sincere or not. They generally explained the Soviet attempts as being a sign of weakness and inner difficulties in the USSR and of their successful building of a defence organization in the West of Europe, including the Federal Republic of Germany.

They generally felt confirmed in their assessment by the Geneva Summit.

3° The Benelux countries did not expect to attend the Summit or the conference. However, they wanted to be consulted and kept informed by their big allies. Like the ancient Greeks, they feared deaf and mute gods.

The Geneva Summit gave them an opportunity of attempting to transform the Ministers' council of NATO into an organisation of general political co-operation where their opinions could be defended and taken into account.

During the conversations in July, Belgium and Netherlands sent observers to Geneva.

In 1955, their main channel of communication with their big allies was NATO and Spaak (or his representative) was their voice. He especially drew attention

⁶⁸. CoCoPo, 26th meeting, item 4.

to the importance of the Western public opinion reactions.

He also advocated for a strict Western solidarity and unity in front of the enemy. In keeping with that strategy, the Benelux countries renounced to send observers in Geneva in October.

The Benelux countries did not prepare any common note or memorandum. They had mutually known their respective positions towards Germany, the USSR or NATO for a long time. They merely took the matter up in general conversations at the Benelux organization level and recorded their identity of views in matters of East-West relations and concerning their expectations of the Summit.

The documents that I have studied when preparing this text left me with a strong impression of typical cold war literature. No change in the arguments, no change in the vocabulary ... in comparison with the earlier cold war years.

The Geneva Summit was satisfactory to their governments and its results were in accordance with their expectations: no reunified Germany, an institutional and political status quo in Europe, an improvement of the international climate and a reassurance concerning the risk of war.

The press was divided between scepticism, prudence and hope.

It was difficult to convince the Benelux countries of the Russians' sincerity, if they were sincere.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BR	Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er (Brussels)
CREHSGM	Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes Historiques de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale (Brussels)
MAE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Brussels)
MBZ	Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (The Hague)
PRO	Public Record Office (London)
SA	Staats Archiv (Luxembourg)

België, de Benelux en de Duitse Kwestie op het topoverleg van Genève (juli 1955)

PASCAL DELOGE

SAMENVATTING

Op 18 juli 1955 wordt in Genève de eerste conferentie van de vier grootmachten sinds het mislukte overleg tussen de ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken van onmiddellijk na de oorlog, geopend. De bevolking hoopt dat er een oplossing zou gevonden worden voor de spanningen die de Koude Oorlog meebrengt. Anderzijds kan het niet anders dan dat de belangrijke en netelige Duitse Kwestie vooraan de agenda zou staan.

De publieke opinie en de regeringen van de Beneluxlanden evolueren rond drie polen: de oude (Duitse) vijand, het nieuwe (Russische) gevaar en de drie grootmachten die in Genève het Westen vertegenwoordigen. De Belgische en Nederlandse diplomatieke diensten staan erg sceptisch tegenover de onderhandelingsvoorstellen van de Sovjets. Er wordt aan de Russische oprechtheid getwijfeld, en indien de USSR naar de onderhandelingstafel is gekomen, dan is dat voor Brussel en Den Haag te danken aan de tot dan toe gevoerde standvastigheidspolitiek. Ze staan dan ook een voortzetting van die politiek voor, en een vrijwaring van de Atlantische solidariteit, zonder daarmee bij de westerse publieke opinie de indruk te willen wekken ieder overleg af te wijzen. De kanselarijen van de Benelux zijn ook geen voorstanders van de Duitse eenmaking, die niet met hun belangen zou stroken.

Na in het kader van de commissie voor politieke coördinatie, die door de drie kleine landen opgericht werd om tot een gemeenschappelijke standpuntbepaling te komen alvorens hun geallieerden te ontmoeten, tot overeenstemming te zijn gekomen, worden deze zienswijzen o.l.v. Spaak op de voorbereidende 'Atlantische' vergaderingen medegedeeld. Wel te verstaan oefenen ze op de topontmoeting zelf geen enkele invloed uit, die blijft een 'olympische' aangelegenheid. Niettemin wordt het gebeuren aandachtig gevolgd en, nu eens hoopvol en dan weer sceptisch en ironiserend, door de Belgische, Nederlandse en Luxemburgse pers gecommentarieerd. Waren de Russen oprecht of niet? Het hoort niet tot mijn bevoegdheid om op die moeilijke vraag te antwoorden. Maar als ze het waren, dan hebben ze veel moeite gehad om België en de Benelux hiervan te overtuigen.

La Belgique, le Benelux et la question allemande à la réunion au sommet de Genève (juillet 1955)

PASCAL DELOGE

RÉSUMÉ

Le 18 juillet 1955 s'ouvre à Genève la première conférence entre les 4 grands depuis la faillite de la conférence des ministres des affaires étrangères de l'immédiat après-guerre. Dans la population, l'espoir est grand de voir trouvée une solution aux tensions internationales de la guerre froide. D'autre part, l'importante et épineuse question allemande ne pouvait pas ne pas figurer en première ligne de l'ordre du jour.

L'opinion publique et les gouvernements des pays Benelux, belge en particulier, oscillent entre trois pôles: l'ancien ennemi (allemand), le nouveau danger (russe) et les trois grands qui, à Genève, représentent l'Occident. Les diplomaties belges et néerlandaises se montrent très sceptiques face aux propositions soviétiques de négociations. La sincérité russe leur semble en cause et, si l'URSS cherche la négociation, Bruxelles et La Haye y voient le succès de la politique de fermeté menée jusque là. Dès lors, il convient à leurs yeux de poursuivre celle-ci et de préserver la solidarité atlantique sans paraître, devant l'opinion publique occidentale, refuser la discussion. Les chancelleries Benelux n'étaient pas non plus favorable à une réunification allemande, non conforme à leurs intérêts.

Sous le leadership de Spaak, les trois petits états communiquent ce sentiment à leurs alliés via les réunions atlantiques qui préparent le sommet et après s'être entendu au sein de la commission de coordination politique fondée par les trois petits pays pour définir des plateformes communes de négociations avant de rencontrer leurs alliés.

Bien entendu, leur influence sur la conférence elle-même est nulle: le sommet de Genève est l'affaire des "Dieux". Il est cependant suivi avec attention par la presse belge, néerlandaise et luxembourgeoise, tantôt remplie d'espoir, tantôt de scepticisme et d'ironie.

Les Russes étaient-ils sincères ou non? Il n'est pas de mon ressort de répondre à cette vaste question. Mais s'ils l'étaient, ils avaient fort à faire pour en convaincre la Belgique et les pays Benelux.