

THE BELGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE CHALLENGE OF MULTILATERALISM (1944-60)

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The Second World War marked a radical turning-point for Belgian foreign policy. The policy of political independence had shown considerable limitations; with the outbreak of war, it became clear that a return to such a policy was no longer conceivable. On the contrary, the government expressed particular interest in the idea of a new organisation to bring together the states of Western Europe. In the space of a few years, Belgium would join a number of international organisations. At the same time, an increasing number of issues were dealt at an international level, and ever more ministerial departments were establishing links abroad.

This article deals with how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted to this changing situation. In Brussels, its whole structure would need to be rethought; abroad, permanent representations would have to be opened. All of this would require flexibility. At this time, however, the Ministry was being criticised by some as 'old-fashioned, fusty and unwieldy' in the way it was organised¹. In this context, it was justifiable to wonder whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would be able to meet the new challenge of multilateralism.

Faced with the spectacular growth of multilateralism, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was confronted with the choice of which direction to take². One option was to focus on coordination; it could allow the more 'technical' departments to develop their own international links, and ensure these various initiatives had some form of consistency. By following this strategy, the Ministry would not so much be acting as Belgium's sole voice abroad, but rather would ensure, back home, a certain unity of approach. The alternative would be for the Ministry to decide to deal with all the issues emerging in the international arena on its own. In this case, it would need to create more services, and make its civil servants into experts : the "functionalist" approach. We shall now consider whether the actions taken by the Ministry reflect one or other of these alternatives faced by the Ministry.

The archives held by the Ministry itself are the best way of accessing information on its internal affairs. We have also referred to personal archives, built up by former ministers and diplomats who were involved in events at the time, or witnessed them personally. Minutes of meetings of the Council of Minister, press reports and personal interviews have also provided further valuable information.

Our analysis can be divided into five stages. We shall begin by giving an overview of the alliances entered into by Belgium. We will then consider the increasing role played by various other departments on the international stage, and the reaction of the Foreign Ministry to this. Thirdly, we analyse how the Ministry's Central Administration adapted to multilateralism. We then look at the Foreign Service, before we will return again to the original question under discussion.

I. The age of alliances

On the eve of the German invasion of May 1940, Belgium was still officially neutral but as soon as the Belgian government established itself in London, it began to prepare a radical change in its foreign policy. The Belgians in exile were still deeply attached to the idea of national sovereignty, and generally hostile to the concept of a European Union³. Nevertheless, the idea of cooperation between states as a new basis for international relations was gradually gaining ground. This position would have political, as well as economic, implications. CEPAG – the Commission for the study of post-war problems – set up by the government at the beginning of 1941 understood this

1. "L'organisation vieillie, poussiéreuse et lourde", in *Pourquoi Pas ?*, 19.11.1946. 2. Here we are making use of a model already used in political science to study the way in which Foreign Ministries adapted to the challenges of multilateralism. We refer, in particular, to Wolf-DIETER EBERWEIN, HANS PETER NEUHOLD, *The Adaptation of Foreign Ministries to Structural Changes in the International System. A comparative Study of the Ministries for Foreign Affairs of Austria and the FRG*, Vienna, 1981. Cf. also CLAUDIA HIEPPEL, "Le ministère ouest-allemand des Affaires étrangères et l'intégration européenne, des origines à 1974", in LAURENCE BADEL, STANISLAS JEANNESSON, PIERS LUDLOW (eds.), *Les administrations nationales et la construction européenne. Une approche historique (1919-1975)*, Bruxelles, 2005, p. 239-258. 3. THIERRY GROSBOIS, "Les projets des petites nations de Benelux pour l'après-guerre. 1941-1945", in MICHEL DUMOULIN (ed.), *Plans des temps de guerre pour l'Europe d'après-guerre. 1940-1947. Actes du colloque de Bruxelles 12-14 mai 1993*, Bruxelles, 1995, p. 110 and 117.

very clearly. “Cruel experience has shown”, it stated, “that it is not possible to solve the problems caused by cyclical economic trends by leaving things to the arbitrary initiative of states acting separately”⁴. On 21 October 1943, representatives of the Belgo-Luxembourgish Economic Union signed a monetary agreement with the Netherlands, foreshadowing the future Benelux Union. Whilst small and medium-sized powers were side-lined from debates on security issues, Belgium intended to achieve tangible successes in the economic sphere.

In May 1944, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paul-Henri Spaak, explained to his colleagues his concept of a three-stage development of international organisations : a regional stage, a European stage and finally a global stage⁵. This was a foretaste of his famous speech to Parliament on 6 December 1944⁶. It was a time for forging alliances. Belgium, in this area, would essentially pursue two courses. For military cooperation, it would concentrate on the Atlantic, whereas for economic cooperation, it would turn towards Europe⁷. Belgian policy, however, was not acting according to a pre-defined plan. Rather, it grasped the opportunities which came its way

with a view, above all, to ensuring its own national security and prosperity.

At an international level, Belgium soon joined the United Nations, but without much enthusiasm⁸. Whilst the UN tended to reinforce the hegemony of the Great Powers, Belgian priorities were focused elsewhere. Paul-Henri Spaak’s intention was to develop forms of political, economic and military cooperation within Europe. It should, however, be stressed that Spaak was firmly against the development of opposing blocs of countries. As he remarked to his colleagues in May 1944, “we must avoid...the creation of blocs of countries opposed to each other and playing into the hands of Germany by vying for its friendship”⁹. Until 1947, Belgium chose to wait before taking action, and called for all the victorious countries to remain on good terms¹⁰.

1947 was a year of change. On 5 June, General George Marshall declared the United States’ intention to help Europe get back on its feet. Spaak realised that a “decisive turning point” had been reached : “the idea of cooperation with the USSR is no longer feasible and...we shall try something else” he wrote to Camille

4. “De cruelles expériences ont démontré que la solution des problèmes posés par les mouvements des cycles économiques ne pourrait être laissée à l’initiative arbitraire des États travaillant en ordre dispersé” (DIANE DE BELLEFROID, “The Commission pour l’Étude des Problèmes d’Après-Guerre (CEPAG). 1941-1944”, in MARTIN CONWAY & JOSE GOTOVITCH, *Europe in Exile. European Exile Communities in Britain. 1940-1945*, New-York/Oxford, 2001, p. 130. 5. AGR, PVCM, 4 May 1944 (http://extranet.arch.be/lang_pvminister.html). 6. APC, session of 6 December 1944, p. 90-93. Cf., in particular, p. 92. 7. LUC DE VOS & ETIENNE ROOMS, *Het Belgisch buitenlands beleid. Geschiedenis en actoren*, Leuven, 2006, p. 69. 8. JULES GÉRARD-LIBOIS & ROSINE LEWIN, *La Belgique entre dans la Guerre Froide et l’Europe. 1947-1953*, Bruxelles, 1992, p. 33. 9. “Il faut éviter (...) la formation de blocs qui seraient opposés les uns aux autres et qui feraient le jeu futur de l’Allemagne en cherchant son amitié les uns contre les autres” (AGR, PVCM, 4.5.1944). 10. OMER DE RAEYMAEKER, “Signification de l’appartenance à une alliance pour les petits États”, in *Studia Diplomatica*, vol. XXIV, 1.1971, n°. 1, p. 13.

Gutt on 20 June¹¹. At the Ministry, however, diplomats had differing views on international developments. The cases of Hervé de Gruben and Edouard le Ghait have been examined at length¹². Even during the war, the former expressed scepticism as to whether the Allies could continue to work together in peacetime. Edouard le Ghait could not bring himself to agree with the anti-Soviet and pro-Atlantic policies which, after 1948, became the cornerstones of Belgian foreign policy. In 1953, he left the diplomatic service.

In the space of a few years, Belgium signed up to a number of international organisations. On 16 April 1948, it joined the OEEC¹³; on 5 May 1949, it was one of the ten founder members of the Council of Europe. On 17 March 1948, Belgium became a co-signatory of the Brussels Pact. The pact still evoked the threat of German aggression; in fact, it was essentially a precautionary measure to fend off Soviet ideology¹⁴. As a logical follow-

up, Belgium became a member of NATO¹⁵. This move was no doubt inevitable given the shortcomings of the Brussels Pact, and the powerlessness of the UN. It confirmed the fact that, from 1947, the crucial point of reference for foreign policy was no longer Great Britain, but the United States¹⁶. From 1950, Belgium would be involved in the first steps towards European integration.

In the post-1945 world, multilateralism seemed to be “the right way for diplomacy to adapt and respond to the growing interdependence of states”¹⁷. Multilateralism, originally a response to a particular set of circumstances, became the norm. For the diplomatic world, this was a “real cultural revolution”¹⁸.

Importantly, for a small country such as Belgium, the development of international organisations was both a necessity and an opportunity¹⁹. Belgium, unable to defend its interests without external help, was now only

11. “*L’idée d’une collaboration avec l’URSS n’a plus cours et (...) l’on va essayer autre chose*” (Quoted in MICHEL DUMOULIN, *Spaak*, Bruxelles, 1999, p. 407). **12.** MARTEEN VAN ALSTEIN, “Wat betekende de Koude Oorlog? Belgische diplomaten en de vijandige bipolarisering: Edouard Le Ghait en baron Hervé de Gruben?”, in *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis*, 12.2008, n°. 20, p. 103-143. **13.** KAREL VERAGHTERT, “De naoorlogse economie en het Marshallplan. 1944-1960”, in MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT, LIEVE BEULLENS, *Oost West. West Best. België onder de Koude Oorlog (1947-1989)*, Tiel, 1997, p. 73-78. **14.** MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT, LIEVE BEULLENS, FRANK DECAT, “De buitenlandse en militaire politiek van België in een gebipolariseerde wereld”, in MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT, LIEVE BEULLENS, *Oost West...*, p. 54. **15.** RIK COOLSAET, “La Belgique dans l’OTAN”, in *Courrier hebdomadaire*, CRISP, n°. 1999, 2008, p. 10-16. **16.** RIK COOLSAET, *La politique extérieure de la Belgique. Au cœur de l’Europe, le poids d’une petite puissance*, Bruxelles, 2002, p. 91. **17.** “*L’adaptation et la réponse de la diplomatie à l’interdépendance croissante des États*” (RIK COOLSAET & TINE VANDERVELDEN, “Nouvel ordre mondial, nouvelle diplomatie?”, in CLAUDE ROOSENS, VALÉRIE ROSOUX, TANGUY DE WILDE D’ESTMAEL (eds.), *La politique étrangère. Le modèle classique à l’épreuve*, Bruxelles, 2004. **18.** RAOUL DELCORDE, *Les diplomates belges*, Wavre, 2010, p. 90. **19.** “If she [Belgium] remains a living, autonomous legal entity, it is only thanks to the great international organisations of which she is a member” wrote the diplomat Robert Rothschild (“*Si elle reste une entité juridique autonome vivante, c’est uniquement grâce aux grandes organisations internationales auxquelles elle participe*”). ROBERT ROTHSCHILD, “Le rôle du diplomate classique dans les relations internationales actuelles”, in *Belgisch buitenlands beleid en internationale betrekkingen. Liber Amicorum Professor Omer De Raeymaeker*, Leuven, 1978, p. 663.

able to ensure its continued independence with the aid of a system of alliances. Within these organisations, it would be able, in certain cases, to exert a real influence internationally²⁰. In fact, the rise of multilateralism did not fundamentally alter the objectives of Belgian diplomacy. Economic prosperity and national security would still be its guiding-principles²¹.

Rather than amending its overall policy objectives, multilateralism brought about a change in working context and methods. Multilateral meetings were made up of many partners, and the methods of negotiation used were very different. The subjects dealt with were also increasingly technical and diverse, therefore calling for the involvement of more players. This could, of course, represent a threat to the Foreign Ministry.

II. Foreign affairs for all

As soon as the war was over, Paul-Henri Spaak noticed that several of his colleagues were increasing their contacts abroad. In

June 1945, he sent a letter to the members of the government on this subject. "I have observed recently that there seems to be some uncertainty as to the rules which, in my opinion, should govern negotiations with foreign governments and their institutions"²². Spaak took care to spell out the rules which he believed should apply. He explained that, "in principle, negotiations with foreign governments fall within the remit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs"²³. Spaak agreed that other ministries could establish contacts abroad on their own initiative; but argued that the Foreign Ministry should be informed of these links or be required to authorise them depending on the case in question. Gaston Eyskens, the Minister of Finance, did not fail to react, emphasising the usefulness of direct contacts between the Treasuries of different countries. "There are multiple technical issues involved. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not in a position to deal with these with sufficient expertise and rapidity"²⁴.

On 9 October, Spaak felt the need to recall the relevant rules at the Council of Minis-

20. As recalled by Jacques Willequet, the rise of multilateralism allowed small states – represented by strong personalities – to exert greater influence than would be possible in a context of bilateral relations (JACQUES WILLEQUET, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs", in ZARA STEINER (ed.), *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World*, London, 1982, p. 87). **21.** For a more detailed view of the objectives of Belgian diplomacy, see LUC DE VOS, ETIENNE ROOMS, *Het Belgisch buitenlands beleid...*, p. 28-29. **22.** "J'ai constaté ces derniers temps qu'un certain flottement semble régner dans la conception des règles qui à mon avis doivent régir les négociations avec les Gouvernements étrangers et leurs organes" (SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 12.230, Draft letter from the Foreign Minister to all ministers, Brussels, 16.6.1945). **23.** "En principe, les négociations avec les Gouvernements étrangers sont du ressort du Ministère des Affaires étrangères" (SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 12.230, Draft letter from the Foreign Minister to all ministers, Brussels, 16.6.1945). **24.** "La multiplicité des questions techniques ne permettra d'ailleurs pas au Département des Affaires étrangères un règlement à la fois suffisamment compétent et suffisamment rapide" (SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 12.230, Letter from the Finance Minister to Spaak, Brussels, 5.7.1945).



During the San Francisco Conference (April-June 1945), the delegates of fifty countries, including Belgium, signed the United Nations Charter. Next to the American president Truman, the US secretary of Foreign Affairs Edward Stettinius is signing the Charter. (United Nations Photo archive, No. 1326)

ters²⁵. Two weeks later, he complained that his colleague Edgar Lalmand, the Minister for Supplies, had been involved in implementing an economic agreement between France and Belgium without informing him in advance²⁶. As these cases show, the rules laid down were not necessarily followed.

Such occurrences became more and more frequent. From 1946, a number of ministries set up their own departments of international relations²⁷. In some cases these were in direct contact with international organisations themselves. In 1949 a study was carried out by the Secretary-General, Hervé de Gruben, on "the normal role of the Foreign Ministry, generally, in its particular sphere of activity : international relations"²⁸. In May 1950, new guidelines, drawn up jointly by the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's Department, were adopted in the Council of Ministers²⁹. On this occasion, de Gruben issued a particularly interesting departmental memo : "The variety of practices in this area are partially the fault of our own Ministry;

when our staff have neglected to carry out a task of an international nature which should normally have fallen within our remit, other departments have felt entitled to take on this task themselves. ...In the past, some of our services were inadequately staffed, and their functions were not sufficiently clearly defined to meet the particular requirements related to supplementary work in new international areas. These difficulties have now been resolved, and the Ministry is now in a position to fulfil all its duties"³⁰.

Besides the abrupt tone of the text, typical of its author, there are three points of interest. First, Gruben has observed a change involving the extension of international activity to new sectors; he sees a risk : that other ministries might encroach upon the sphere of activity of the Foreign Ministry. Secondly, we learn that the Ministry has not failed to react to these changes. The Secretary-General speaks of a shortage of staff, and feels that tasks have not been sufficiently clearly allocated but also states that these two problems have been resolved. There is a third point of interest. Now-

25. AGR, PVCM, 9.10.1945. 26. AGR, PVCM, 23.10.1945. 27. INSTITUT ROYAL DES RELATIONS INTERNATIONALES, *Les conséquences d'ordre interne de la participation de la Belgique aux organisations internationales*, Bruxelles, 1964, p. 52. 28. "le rôle normal que doit jouer, d'une manière générale, le ministère des Affaires étrangères dans un domaine qui lui est spécifiquement propre, à savoir les relations internationales" (SPFAE, AA, *Affaires étrangères II*, 2860, Minutes of the meeting held at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, on Tuesday 22 November 1949, concerning relations of the Colonial Affairs and Foreign Affairs Ministries with international organisations, Brussels, 19.12.1949). 29. AGR, PVCM, 26.5.1950. 30. "La dispersion qui a régné en cette matière est due pour une certaine part à la carence de notre propre Ministère : lorsqu'il négligeait de remplir une tâche d'ordre international qui lui aurait incombé normalement, d'autres Départements se croyaient autorisés à l'assumer. (...) Pour faire face aux nécessités particulières résultant d'une extension à de nouveaux domaines de l'activité internationale, certains services n'étaient pas assez fournis de personnel et leurs attributions étaient insuffisamment définies. Cette lacune a été comblée depuis lors et le Département est équipé de manière à pouvoir répondre à toutes ses obligations" (SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 12.202, Departmental note from H. de Gruben, No. 33/50, Brussels, 30.5.1950).

here does Gruben imply that changes in international relations should result in a changed role for the Ministry : the Ministry needs to deal with more, new issues; but it should not deal with these in a different way. Gruben refers to a “co-ordinating and guiding” function; between the lines, we can see his clear wish for the Foreign Ministry to retain its overall hold on external relations.

Two years later, the Council of Ministers discussed a possible modification of the 1950 circular. The general idea was that ministries should only send their staff abroad on official business if they had received a declaration from the Foreign Ministry stating that the task in question could not be accomplished by Foreign Ministry officials alone³¹. Having discussed this option, however, the Council decided not to accept the amendment. A few weeks later, Foreign Minister Paul van Zeeland asked the Prime Minister to remind his colleagues of the role of Foreign Ministry staff when ministers travelled abroad or when ministers from other countries visited Belgium³². These examples show the Foreign Ministry's wish to exert more control over Belgian foreign relations but also how difficult it was finding it to achieve this. The problem was actually far from being solved. In the field of European integration, the ministries of Economic Affairs, Colonial Affairs and Agriculture and others would also have their own views in addition to those of the Foreign Ministry³³.

III. The Central Administration

In the immediate post-war period, an increasing number of complaints began to be heard at the Foreign Ministry. There were calls to modernise its way of working, to recruit high-quality staff and to create new departments³⁴. It gradually became clear that changes in the global context, coupled with Belgium's membership of the new international organisations, would mean that changes had to be made. The staffing structures, in fact, would be revised soon afterwards. It must be noted, however, that these changes sometimes seemed rather empirical or even random in nature.

At this point, we should briefly introduce the central administration of the Foreign Ministry. For much of the period under consideration, its structure consisted of a Ministerial cabinet, the General secretariat and four Directorates General, each of which was referred to by a particular letter : General Services ('A'), Chancellery and Disputes ('C'), Political Affairs ('P') and Foreign Trade ('B'). As P and B were most affected – even disturbed – by the rise of multilateralism, we shall focus on them.

Directorate General for Political Affairs

Multilateralism already existed before the Second World War but only in embryonic form. Belgian membership of the first international organisations had only limited repercussions on the way in which the Foreign Ministry was organised³⁵. Generally speaking,

31. AGR, *PVCM*, 23.5.1952. 32. AGR, *PVCM*, 27.6.1952. 33. MICHEL DUMOULIN, “Une politique européenne à plusieurs voix (1950-1962)”, in JAN ARTS & LUC FRANÇOIS (ed.), *Docendo Discimus. Liber amicorum Romain Van Eenoo*, Band 1, Gent, 1999, p. 269. 34. AGR.

35. INSTITUT ROYAL DES RELATIONS INTERNATIONALES, *Les conséquences d'ordre interne...*, p. 45.



Paul-Henri Spaak signs the Pact of Brussels in March 1948. Great-Britain, France and the Benelux countries agreed on more political, economic and military cooperation as well as a stronger rapprochement to the US. (ANP Historisch Archief, No. 889167)

the remit of these organisations was very narrow and did not require the establishment of a specific department. The League of Nations, in turn, dealt in the 'high-level politics' generally reserved for the Foreign Minister, his colleagues and close co-workers. A 'League of Nations Section' was however created within the ministry and would continue to function throughout the interwar period³⁶.

As early as the summer of 1945, even before the end of the San Francisco Conference, a new "Department of peace conferences and international organisations" was established. It was officially founded by Royal Decree of the Regent on 17 November 1945³⁷. The department was set up in order to fulfil three main roles : first to monitor developments in the UN and to coordinate Belgium's activities in this area; to ensure continuity with the former Belgian office at the League of Nations and finally to coordinate responses to issues raised by the peace settlement³⁸. France took a similar approach and on 13 April 1945 set up a "Conference Secretariat", taking over from the League of Nations Department, and which would later become the United Nations and International Organisations Directorate³⁹.

The speed with which this department was brought into being might give the impression that the Ministry was very quick to spot that the creation of the UN implied a significant change in international relations. This was not in fact the case. Initially, the department was envisaged as temporary. Moreover it was not attached to the Directorate-General for Political Affairs, but to the secretariat, like other branches including the Protocol service, the archives and the accounts department. The diplomat Frédéric De Ridder assigned to the General Secretariat, provided an interesting insight when he described the new department as "basically, the League of Nations department, but dealing with broader issues and responsible for questions concerning reparations and restitutions"⁴⁰. There was nothing revolutionary about it at all.

The person chosen to head this unit was Georges Kaeckenbeeck⁴¹. This brilliant lawyer, retired from his former position at the League of Nations, had made himself available to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the war. In London, he became the Ministry's legal advisor. Back in Brussels, he moved directly

36. This department is shown for the first time in the organisational charts of 1921, under the name of *Section de la Société des Nations et du Bureau des Informations belges*. One year later, it is referred to again as the *Section de la Société des Nations*, a name which it would keep until 1927, when it became the *Bureau belge de la Société des Nations* (DELPHINE SOQUETTE, *L'organisation de l'administration centrale du ministère des Affaires étrangères belge de 1914 à nos jours*, political science dissertation, Université catholique de Louvain, 1999, p. 206-210). 37. *Moniteur belge*, 19.12.1945, p. 8691. 38. SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 18.743, Note from the deputy head of department on organisation of 'K' department, 26.1.1948. 39. JEAN BAILLOU & PIERRE PELLETIER, *Les Affaires étrangères*, Paris, 1962, p. 76. 40. "Au fond, c'est le service de la Société des Nations qui reprend avec plus d'extension et traite les affaires de réparation et restitutions" (CEGESOMA, AJDF, AA2203, 14, Letter from Frédéric De Ridder to Jacques Delvaux de Fenffe, 18.8.1945). 41. FERNAND VANLANGENHOVE, "Kaeckenbeeck Georges", in *Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*", in *Biographie Nationale*, vol. 40, Bruxelles, 1977, col. 543-553.

into the highest ranks of the administration, by-passing the competitive examination for the diplomatic service. Interestingly, the department was referred to as 'K' service in reference to his surname⁴².

'K' was divided into three sections. The peace conferences section was responsible for coordinating the work done by the other departments involved in this area. The international organisations section focussed more narrowly on questions related to the UN. Finally, the job of the treaties section was to ensure that the agreements and other international commitments to which Belgium was party were kept up to date⁴³.

Inevitably, the setting up of a new department would also cause certain difficulties in terms of distribution of responsibilities. "It has proved difficult up to now to define the exact responsibilities of K Department, both in the area of international organisations and in that of peace conferences» read a note dated January 1948⁴⁴. There were found to be numerous inconsistencies and anomalies. On 6 January the Secretary-General held a meeting with Kaeckenbeeck and the various Directors-General to re-examine the tasks and powers of the individual departments⁴⁵.

There were particular difficulties concerning the activity of international organisations and decisions were taken. 'K' would deal with their functional activities; the other directorates-general would be responsible for questions of substance.

At the beginning of 1948, the deputy head of 'K' voiced a wish that it be given permanent status⁴⁶. He went even further, asking for it to be promoted to the status of a directorate-general! "Would this not be a particularly appropriate way of expressing the importance attached by Belgium to the far-reaching and, in the widest senses of the term, humanitarian work of the United Nations?"⁴⁷. 'K' did not become a directorate-general but in July 1949 it became part of the Directorate-General for Political Affairs and was renamed the "Directorate for international organisations and peace settlements".

Once the war was over, 'P' was essentially structured into a number of geographical sections, each focused on a particular part of the world. Multilateralism gradually introduced new ways of working; as Belgium signed the Brussels Pact, the Atlantic Pact and joined the Council of Europe, the Ministry opened departments to deal with issues

42. SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 13.765, Note with no title or date (*Dans l'organisation gouvernementale et administrative de la Belgique...*). 43. SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 18.743, Record of the meeting of heads of department, 11.2.1947. 44. "Le problème de la compétence exacte du Service K, tant dans le domaine de l'Organisation Internationale que dans celui des Conférences de la Paix, s'est avéré jusqu'à ce jour difficile à résoudre" (AD, *Political File*, 18.743, Note from the deputy head of department concerning the organisation of K department, 26.1.1948). 45. SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 13.765, Louis Colot, Minutes of the meeting of heads of department, 6.1.1948. 46. SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 18.743, Note from the deputy head of department concerning the organisation of 'K', 26.1.1948. 47. "Ne serait-ce pas une façon particulièrement adéquate de manifester l'intérêt que porte la Belgique à l'œuvre gigantesque et humanitaire, dans le sens le plus large du terme, des Nations Unies" (SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 18.743, Note from the deputy head of department concerning the organisation of 'K', 26.1.1948).



The Belgian minister of Foreign Affairs Paul-Henri Spaak with Robert Silvercruys, who served as the Belgian ambassador in Washington from 1945 to 1959. Silvercruys was a key figure in the Belgian turn towards Atlantism. (Photo archief Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Brussels)

relating to these organisations. All three of these came under the same directorate. The first steps towards European integration also resulted in changes to the structure of 'P'. In 1954, a new section was set up, for the European Political Community. This section disappeared the following year. In 1957, another section appeared for 'European political integration' but this was no longer mentioned in the organisational charter for 1959 – only in 1961 would a new directorate be created for 'political aspects of European integration'.

These changes in no way prove that everyone in the Ministry was enthusiastic about this move into the age of alliances. Paul van Zeeland, for example, Foreign Minister from 1949 to 1954, "watched over his country like a precious treasure" and did his best to limit attempts to undermine national sovereignty⁴⁸. Another key figure was Jacques Delvaux de Fenffe⁴⁹. In 1953, this 59-year old diplomat was appointed Director-General for Political Affairs. Marcel-Henri Jaspas, Belgian ambassador to Brazil, referred to this appointment as "one of the most extraordinary events of the last two or three years"⁵⁰. He was referring to Delvaux's political views; Delvaux

was an old-school diplomat and a stalwart champion of national sovereignty. He was worried by the idea of alliances. "An alliance", he wrote, "is a highly serious political act for a state. At stake are the lives of its young people, its territory and the means of existence of its population. An alliance can even undermine the independence, the very existence of a state"⁵¹. Above all, Delvaux feared that smaller countries would lose their identity and power when subsumed into larger groupings.

Take NATO, for example : Delvaux was not against the idea of NATO, but was constantly worried that the alliance would push Belgium to go beyond the commitments it had made. "Belgium must be careful", he wrote, "not to be dragged into conflicts which do not involve our interests, and which do not represent a threat to our security or honour"⁵². "It would be a dangerous confusion of ideas to wish to give the Atlantic Pact...the powers of a supra-national body"⁵³. For him, NATO was an alliance, "a temporary grouping, formed to promote a vital common interest. Each member country intends to maintain its own full sovereignty when the alliance comes to an end. An alliance in

48. VINCENT DUJARDIN, MICHEL DUMOULIN, *Paul van Zeeland. 1893-1973*, Bruxelles, 1997, p. 263.

49. For more information on the career and beliefs of Delvaux de Fenffe, cf. DIRK MARTIN, "Belgian diplomats in the Cold War. The case of Jacques Delvaux de Fenffe", in *Historiens de l'Europe contemporaine*, n°. 8, 12.1993 (3-4), p. 207-213. 50. "L'une des choses les plus extraordinaires que nous ayons vues depuis deux ou trois ans" (AGR, *Papiers Marcel-Henri Jaspas*, 957, Letter from Marcel-Henri Jaspas to Pierre-Ernest Jaspas, Rio-de-Janeiro, 4.9.1953). 51. "Une alliance est un acte politique très grave pour un État. Elle met en jeu la vie de toute une jeunesse, le territoire et les moyens d'existence d'un peuple. Elle risque même de compromettre l'indépendance et l'existence de l'État" (CEGESOMA, AJDF, AA 669, 18, Rough draft of a note to the Secretary General, cc. 1-2.1954). 52. "La Belgique doit veiller à ne pas être entraînée dans des conflits étrangers à nos intérêts et si notre sécurité et notre honneur ne sont pas menacés" (CEGESOMA, AJDF, AA669, 17 V, Notes by Delvaux de Fenffe, *Politique militaire*). 53. "Vouloir attribuer au pacte Atlantique (...) les pouvoirs d'une entité supra nationale c'est faire une dangereuse confusion" (CEGESOMA, AJDF, AA669, 17 II, Notes by Delvaux de Fenffe, 26.11.1956).

no way implies political unity [original emphasis]⁵⁴.

Delvaux was much less in favour of the plan for a European Defence Community. In his view, no attempts should be made to move towards European integration until Europe itself had reached a moral, political, social and economic equilibrium⁵⁵. Delvaux de Fenffe would remain in the post of Director-General of Political Affairs until October 1959. A few weeks before his departure, *Le Peuple* still did not know who his successor would be but significantly stated that “all we have been told is that his successor is a staunch supporter of European unification”⁵⁶. Amaury Holvoet took over from Delvaux. He was not an expert in multilateralism but was not against the idea of alliances. By now it was the end of the 1950s, and the wind of change was beginning to blow at 8, *rue de la Loi*...

The Directorate-General for Foreign Trade

Having looked at the political aspect of multilateralism, we should now turn to its economic aspect. In the 1950s, this emerged particularly clearly with the first steps towards European integration. The proposal by Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister, launched a process which would radically change international relations on the continent

and Europe would gradually take its place at the heart of Belgium’s international policy. Although the Schuman proposal was clearly of political interest, its substance originally dealt with economic matters.

On 9 May 1950, Schuman officially announced his famous proposal. Its main idea, bringing together the coal and steel production of France and Germany, was completely novel. Only ten days later Paul van Zeeland addressed the issue in the Council of Ministers⁵⁷. There was no long speech – the Minister merely mentioned that Schuman had visited the delegations of the Benelux countries. A few days later another meeting took place, this time in Paris. Paul van Zeeland was unable to attend and instead Jean Duvieusart, Minister for Economic Affairs, went in his place. It was Duvieusart who gave a long explanation of the main points in the Schuman plan to his colleagues in government on 26 May. Strikingly, the points put forward during the discussion were the economic arguments alone.

Negotiations were to happen in Paris and on 31 May a meeting took place to prepare for them. Interestingly, the officials met at the cabinet office of Jean-Charles Snoy⁵⁸, Secretary-General of the Ministry of

54. “Une alliance est un groupement temporaire pour un intérêt vital commun. Chaque pays membre entend conserver sa souveraineté entière au moment de la fin. L’alliance n’implique nullement unité politique” [CEGESOMA, AJDF, AA669, 17 V, Notes by Delvaux de Fenffe (*Alliance-intégration*)]. 55. CEGESOMA, AJDF, AA669, 17 I, Letter from Delvaux de Fenffe to Walravens, 12.8.1955. 56. “Tout ce qu’on a bien voulu nous dire, à son sujet, est qu’il s’agit d’un grand partisan de l’unification européenne” (*Le Peuple*, 7.9.1959). 57. AGR, PVCM, 19.5.1950. 58. Born in 1907, Jean-Charles Snoy et d’Oppuers had a brilliant career. By the age of 32, he was Secretary-General of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. After the war, he became Belgium’s main representative in the field of multilateral economic relations. In March 1957, together with Spaak, he represented Belgium at the signing of the Treaties of Rome. After a few years in the private sector, he returned to the post of Minister of Finance in the Eyskens IV government (1968-71).



Jean-Charles Sney d'Oppuers in 1949. As the secretary-general of the department of Economic Affairs, he played a keyrole in developing mutual economic collaboration in western Europe. (Photo KADOC, KFB 1295)

Economic Affairs and Suetens and Seynaeve represented the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁵⁹. On 5 June, another preparatory meeting took place with the delegates from Luxembourg. This too was held at the Ministry of Economic Affairs but was chaired by Seynaeve. Two days later, the Belgian and Luxembourgish delegates met their Dutch counterparts. This time the meeting took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but was chaired by Sney. Finally, Suetens would be in charge of the ECSC negotiations. In Paris, he was assisted by officials from the Foreign Ministry as well as by technical experts from the specialised departments and representatives from industry and the trade unions⁶⁰. The Foreign Ministry would express satisfaction with the way in which the work had been shared out⁶¹.

However, implementation of the Schuman Plan caused more conflicts as to the division of responsibilities. On 19 December 1952, Albert Coppé, the Minister for Economic Affairs, expressed a wish that “the Council should take a decision concerning the difference of opinion between his department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as to which

was responsible for the Schuman Plan”⁶². The Foreign Ministry noted that “the Department of Economic Affairs is dealing directly with the ECSC bodies”⁶³. But Ministry of Economic Affairs was not the only rival. The plan to organise European agricultural markets and the planned integration of transport systems proved particularly complex. “In both these cases, the Ministries of Agriculture and Communications seem to feel that they should be in charge both in the case of national issues and for international issues” the Foreign Ministry complained⁶⁴.

In terms of relations between the various departments and ministries, an interesting question was whether specific rules should be drawn up to govern the area of European integration. It was felt that this should not be necessary but that it was nonetheless important to “further emphasise the principle whereby our department should take the lead and be responsible for coordination”. The senior official Pierre Attilio Forthomme insisted that in issues concerning integration, the coordinating role of the Foreign Ministry was “probably more urgently required than for

59. PPvZ, 696, note from Seynaeve, for the attention of the Minister, Etude du Plan Schuman, Brussels, 8.6.1950. 60. MARCEL FREROTTE & MARCEL PEETERS, “La CECA”, in INSTITUT ROYAL DES RELATIONS INTERNATIONALES, *Le rôle des Belges et de la Belgique dans l'édification européenne*, *Studia Diplomatica*, vol. XXXIV, n°. 1-4, 1982, p. 266. 61. SPFAE, AD, *Political-Commercial File*, 6.576, Record of the meeting held on 26 June 1953 on the problem of coordination between ministerial departments concerning official foreign relations. 62. “Le Conseil tranche le différend surgi entre son département et le ministère des Affaires étrangères en ce qui concerne la compétence concernant le Plan Schuman” (AGR, PVMC, 19.12.1952). 63. SPFAE, AD, *Political-Commercial File*, 6.576, Note on coordination between ministerial departments concerning official foreign relations (DG for foreign trade, directorate for European integration), Annex II : Note from the Directorate for European integration ('B') for Monsieur Daufresne de la Chevalerie. 64. “Dans ces deux cas, nous voyons les ministères de l'Agriculture et des Communications considérer qu'ils doivent avoir, tant sur le plan national que sur le plan international, la direction des opérations” (SPFAE, AD, *Political-Commercial File*, 6.576, Record of the meeting held on 26 June 1953, on the problem of coordination between ministerial departments concerning official foreign relations).



An elderly Paul-Henri Spaak sitting in his impressive office. (Photo archief Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Brussels)

other negotiations". This was however under threat : "the Prime Minister's office seems to wish to take charge of the negotiations concerning integration"⁶⁵.

The Foreign Ministry acknowledged that the specialised departments and ministries should be responsible for technical meetings since they had the expertise to deal with the complex subjects under discussion. Forthomme, however, saw problems. "We must be careful not overly to ignore the technical aspects of the questions being discussed. Otherwise, there is a risk that the specialised departments will use these technical questions to take up positions on more general issues"⁶⁶.

In the meantime, nothing would really change in the organisational structure of Directorate-General 'B' until 1951. In June of that year, an International relations directorate was set up to deal with organisations such as the GATT or UN. There was also a new directorate for European integration, responsible for the ECSC. The Minister of Foreign Trade, Joseph

Meurice, commented on these changes in the press. "Did you know that we did not have a section in the Ministry responsible for the Schuman Plan? Delegations had to contact the Minister"⁶⁷.

After the failure of the EDC, it was time to give new impetus to the process. The Foreign Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, was at the forefront of new developments together with a few officials from his Ministry – particularly Robert Rothschild and Albert Hupperts. The first of these was *Chef de Cabinet* to the minister; the second led the European Integration department of 'B'. Interestingly, while Hupperts focused entirely on this area of his work, the steering council suggested in September 1955 that he be relieved of his administrative duties so that he could work solely for the Minister⁶⁸. This would indicate that European integration was driven forward by individuals rather than by administrative structures. In fact, Foreign Ministry staff were not the only ones involved. Spaak worked closely with Jean-Charles Snoy and Joseph

65. "Au surplus, le Cabinet du Premier ministre semble enclin à reprendre à son compte la direction des négociations d'Intégration européenne. (...) C'est pourquoi il est peut-être préférable de faire ressortir plus clairement le principe du rôle de direction et de coordination qui incombe à notre Département. (...) M. Forthomme attire l'attention sur le fait qu'il n'y a pas de raison de dissocier les négociations relatives à l'intégration des autres et qu'au surplus le rôle de coordination qui appartient sans conteste à notre Département, doit y intervenir de façon sans doute plus pressante que dans les autres négociations" (SPFAE, AD, Political-Commercial File, 6.576, Record of the meeting held on 26 June 1953, on the problem of coordination between ministerial departments concerning official foreign relations). **55.** CEGESOMA, AJDF, AA669, 17 I, Letter from Delvaux de Fenffe to Walravens, 12.8.1955.

66. "M. Forthomme signale qu'à son avis, notre désintéressement vis-à-vis de l'aspect technique des problèmes ne doit pas être poussé trop loin, à peine de s'exposer au danger de voir les Départements spécialisés, à partir de questions techniques, prendre position sur des problèmes d'ordre plus général" (SPFAE, AD, Political-Commercial File, 6.576, Record of the meeting held on 26 June 1953, on the problem of coordination between ministerial departments concerning official foreign relations). **67.** "Savez-vous que nous n'avions pas au département une section du plan Schuman ? Les délégations y prenaient seulement contact avec le ministre" (Le Soir, 10.8.1951). **68.** SPFAE, AD, Political File, 14.177 (2), PVCD, 16.9.1955.

Van der Meulen – “one of my most helpful co-workers when negotiating the Treaty of Rome” as Spaak described him⁶⁹.

In European matters, the toughest competition was actually with the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The Ministry played a key role in the 1950s, largely thanks to its Secretary-General, Jean-Charles Snoy. During the war, Snoy had foreseen the growth in multilateral trade, and unlike the Foreign Ministry, had taken this into account in his preparations⁷⁰. As early as 1948, he stated that multilateralism was vital to the survival of European economies⁷¹. Snoy became a pivotal figure. When Spaak was designated President of the OEEC Council, he appointed Snoy as his deputy. In 1949, Snoy, overloaded with work, asked Spaak to remove him from this position but Spaak refused because he could think of no-one who could adequately replace him⁷². In 1951, Snoy took on the post of Chairman of the OEEC Steering Board for Trade. On a number of occasions, it was suggested that Snoy should be transferred to the Foreign Ministry and given the title of Ambassador. He was also considered for the post of Secretary-General and even Foreign Minister. None of these plans came to fruition, but they do tell us a great deal and Snoy was

certainly seen as the key figure in Belgian external economic policy⁷³.

Some years later, Snoy was one of the Belgian negotiators at the Messina Conference. At the Val Duchesse negotiations, chaired by Spaak, he was deputy chairman. He was also at the Minister's side on 27 March 1957 to sign the Treaties of Rome. Finally, in January 1958, Snoy was appointed Belgium's Permanent Representative to the Common Market while Joseph Van Tichelen, also from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, was named Permanent Representative to Euratom.

In the meantime, Snoy had influenced a new generation of diplomats. One of these was Philippe de Schoutheete, who began his training in the diplomatic service in 1956. Between 1958 and 1961, he worked for Snoy as economic attaché at the embassy in Paris where he realised how important multilateralism had become. “In the Foreign Ministry there may well have been some who were not happy, and were jealous of the status of the Secretary-General for Economic Affairs abroad. But for a new generation of diplomats...the lesson was clear : the golden career-path for diplomats now meant working with the multilateral institutions”⁷⁴.

69. “*l'un de mes meilleurs collaborateurs au moment de la négociation du Traité de Rome*” (PAUL-HENRI SPAAK, *Combats inachevés*, tome 2, Paris, 1969, p. 413). 70. Philippe de Schoutheete, who worked for Snoy, writes : “*Le Département n'avait ni pressenti, ni préparé, ni par conséquent su gérer, l'extraordinaire expansion de la dimension économique multilatérale dans l'immédiat après-guerre. Snoy au contraire y avait réfléchi sous l'occupation, l'avait ardemment souhaitée et, avec ses collaborateurs, s'y était engagé à fond*” (VINCENT DUJARDIN & MICHEL DUMOULIN, *Jean-Charles Snoy. Homme dans la Cité, artisan de l'Europe. 1907-1991*, Bruxelles, 2010, p. 8). 71. VINCENT DUJARDIN & MICHEL DUMOULIN, *Jean-Charles Snoy...*, p. 243. 72. *Idem*, p. 248. 73. JEAN-CHARLES SNOY, *Rebâtir l'Europe. Entretiens avec Jean-Claude Ricquier*, Paris/Louvain-la-Neuve, 1989, p. 87. 74. “*Sans doute s'est-il trouvé aux Affaires étrangères des esprits chagrins pour jalouser la position à l'étranger du Secrétaire général des Affaires économiques. Mais pour une génération nouvelle, la leçon était claire. La voie royale de la diplomatie passait dorénavant par les institutions multilatérales*” (Quoted in VINCENT DUJARDIN & MICHEL DUMOULIN, *Jean-Charles Snoy...*, p. 8).

IV. The foreign service

In the five years following the end of the war, the Belgian Foreign Service recruited around one hundred officials⁷⁵. In 1950, the Belgian diplomatic corps numbered 298 diplomats. This figure reached 326 in 1955 before stabilising at 321 five years later⁷⁶. In parallel, Belgium also increased its representation abroad. In 1939, it had 72 diplomatic and consular posts; this number rose to 87 in 1950, and 114 in 1960⁷⁷. These included permanent representations to international organisations. Like the bilateral posts, these representations answered to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The type of diplomacy involved, however, was very different in a number of aspects. Did this mean that diplomats stayed longer in multilateral postings than elsewhere? Did Belgian diplomats specialise in multilateral affairs? The answers to these questions are not clear-cut.

The opening of more Permanent Representations

Belgium opened its first permanent representation in 1945, to the United Nations. This was another proof, following the establishment of 'K', of the importance attached by Belgium to its membership of the UN. This importance was also reflected

in the choice of person to head up the Representation : Fernand Vanlangenhove, the Ministry's Secretary-General and an eminent figure in Belgian diplomatic circles.

The diplomat Alexandre Paternotte de la Vaillée, recruited shortly after the war, recalls that some officials, particularly those who had been around for some time, showed little interest in multilateral diplomacy. Many felt "that much time was wasted holding meetings, which ultimately achieved nothing"⁷⁸. At the same time, however, the number of permanent representations was increasing at a fairly steady pace. Belgium had 6 in 1955, 7 in 1960 and 8 by 1965. In parallel, the number of diplomats working in multilateral posts also increased from 10 in 1950 to 22 in 1960⁷⁹. Nevertheless, the number of diplomats working in a permanent representation as a percentage of all working Belgian diplomats remained fairly low. In 1950 the figure was 3.3 %, rising to 6.8 % in 1960 but to these figures we should add the officials in Brussels specialising in multilateral affairs.

Three exceptional figures stood out at this time : André de Staercke, Joseph Van der Meulen and Roger Ockrent. These men were exceptional in more ways than one;

75. CLAUDE ROOSENS, *Agents diplomatiques et consulaires belges. Conditions de recrutement (1831-1980)*, historical dissertation, Université catholique de Louvain, 1983, p. 166.

76. M. HOEFNAGELS, *Sekundaire analyse van de Belgische diplomatieke dienst*, Brussel, 1974, p. 32. 77. CLAUDE ROOSENS, "De aanwerving van de diplomaten in België. Van een besloten naar een toegankelijke carrière, 1830-1980", in PETER VAN KEMSEKE (ed.), *Diplomatieke cultuur*, Leuven, 2000, p. 221-222. 78. "Il y aura certainement eu une tendance chez certains, et plus que probablement chez les plus anciens, à croire qu'on perdait beaucoup de temps à se réunir pour finalement accoucher de rien" (Interview with avec Alexandre Paternotte de la Vaillée, 30.10.2013). 79. For the number of permanent representations, and diplomats working in them, cf. MARJORIE HOEFNAGELS, *op.cit.*, p. 69.



Jean-Charles Snoy (second from the left, second row) talking to Joseph Bech from Luxemburg on the stairs of the Greek amphitheatre of Taormina on Sicily, 2 June 1955. Further on the right one can also recognise Paul-Henri Spaak. Taormina is close to Messina where politicians and diplomats gathered in 1955 to prepare the treaty of Rome and the creation of the European Economic Community. (Photo KADOC, KFA7943)

not least in the fact that they remained in their posts for an exceptionally long time. André de Staercke was Belgian Permanent Representative to NATO for 26 years (1950-76), Roger Ockrent was Representative to the OECD for 21 years (1953-74) while Joseph Van der Meulen represented his country to the European Communities for 20 years (1959-79). Another striking point was that none of the three was a career diplomat. André de Staercke was the former secretary to Charles, the Prince-Regent⁸⁰. Joseph Van der Meulen had worked with Snoy at the Ministry of Economic Affairs, where he was Director General. He had also been *Chef de Cabinet* to several ministers but never to a Minister of Foreign Affairs⁸¹. Roger Ockrent was Spaak's *Chef de Cabinet* when Spaak was Prime Minister (1947-48) and also worked closely with Snoy⁸².

The appointment of these three officials to such prestigious posts was bound to give rise to a certain amount of bitterness among career diplomats. A typical reaction was that of Robert Rothschild on hearing that Van der Meulen was about to be appointed Permanent Representative to the European Communities.

Rothschild himself had been interested in the post. Very aware of how important the post would become, he saw himself "condemned to acting as a diplomatic puppet here or elsewhere"⁸³, as he wrote to André de Staercke. He continued: "I still believe that although V.D.M. [Van der Meulen] no doubt has more technical knowledge than I do, I would be the better man for the job. It is, moreover, ridiculous – and questionable in administrative terms – for the Ministry to recruit civil servants from other ministries when its own staff are perfectly capable of carrying out these tasks"⁸⁴.

As Rothschild predicted, the fact that the three permanent representatives were not diplomats would cause some administrative problems but it did not prevent all three from gaining the title of Ambassador. On 15 October 1959, the Foreign Minister, Pierre Wigny, obtained this privilege from the King, suggesting that this title would enhance the status of the three candidates vis-à-vis those with whom they were in contact. "After 60 seconds of silent thought", wrote Wigny, "the King said, briefly, 'very well'"⁸⁵.

80. GINETTE KURGAN-VAN HENTENRYK, "de Staercke André", in *ACADÉMIE ROYALE DES SCIENCES, DES LETTRES ET DES BEAUX-ARTS DE BELGIQUE, Nouvelle Biographie Nationale*, vol. 9, Bruxelles, 2007, p. 143-146. **81.** PHILIPPE DE SCHOUTHEETE, "Van der Meulen, Joseph", in *ACADÉMIE ROYALE DES SCIENCES, DES LETTRES ET DES BEAUX-ARTS DE BELGIQUE, Nouvelle Biographie Nationale*, vol. 6, Bruxelles, 2001, p. 352-355. **82.** JUAN CASSIERS, "Ockrent Roger", in *ACADÉMIE ROYALE DES SCIENCES, DES LETTRES ET DES BEAUX-ARTS DE BELGIQUE, Nouvelle Biographie Nationale*, vol. 8, Bruxelles, 2005, p. 285-288. **83.** "condamné à faire la marionnette diplomatique ici ou ailleurs (...)" (SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 18.298 IX, 8, Letter from Rothschild to de Staercke, 19.11.1958). **84.** "je persiste à croire que, quoique V.D.M. soit sans doute techniquement plus compétent que moi, je remplirais ces fonctions mieux que lui. Il est aussi absurde – et administrativement contestable – que le Département recrute des fonctionnaires dans d'autres ministères alors qu'il en possède de parfaitement compétents en son sein" (*Ibidem*). **85.** "Après soixante secondes de réflexion silencieuse, le Roi me dit brièvement : 'D'accord'" (FPW, Vol. 5, M2, notes, Wigny, 15.10.1959).

Multilateral diplomats ?

We have seen that an increasing number of diplomats were working on multilateral issues but does this mean that certain diplomats began to specialise in multilateral affairs? Some examples might give that impression. One such would be that of Fernand Vanlangenhove's very long posting to the UN (11 years). His successor, Joseph Nisot, also had an extremely 'multilateral' career, again without having trained as a diplomat⁸⁶. Another case is that of Jean Doumont, who worked with Van der Meulen between 1961 and 1973⁸⁷.

Careful reading of the source texts, however, undermines this hypothesis and it is interesting in this respect to examine the minutes of the steering council, the body which proposes appointments to the minister. In the 1950s, no reference was made to a possible specialisation for diplomats and it was quite normal for diplomats to move blithely from permanent representation to bilateral postings. When some began to advocate a degree of specialisation, their ideas were not well received. In 1953, for example, when requesting an additional co-worker, Roger Ockrent expressed the

wish for someone who had already been involved in work related to the OEEC but, in response, the steering council declared that it did not agree with "this way of doing things"⁸⁸. A few years later, Van der Meulen "had, on a number of occasions, asked to work with deputies who could stay with him for many years"⁸⁹. This request had to be repeated on a number of occasions, probably because it had fallen on deaf ears... André de Staercke also realised the specialist nature of certain posts. "The nature of multilateral diplomacy", he wrote in 1963, "determines...a certain type of diplomat"⁹⁰. The three permanent representatives had a very good grasp of the particularities of multilateralism. They realised that, even more than in bilateral postings, a longer period in the post increased an official's influence⁹¹. Nevertheless, their requests grated with the general attitude in the Ministry.

In 1963, Secretary-General Jean van den Bosch mooted the idea of creating "a group of specialists" in multilateral affairs⁹². He even spoke of "two different careers" for what were in his view, "two different professions". Van den Bosch's idea was not taken up. In a country where the diplomatic corps was

86. Between 1922 and 1940, Joseph Nisot was seconded to the legal service of the League of Nations. Between 1947 and 1957, he worked at the Belgian Permanent Representation to the United Nations in New York. After his retirement, he still wished to be assigned to the Permanent Delegation to the United Nations in Geneva (SPFAE, AD, *Diplomatic Personnel File*, 2357). **87.** SPFAE, AD, *Diplomatic Personnel File*, 2757. **88.** SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 14.177 (2), PVCD, 15.6.1953. **89.** "le délégué permanent a exprimé à plusieurs reprises le souhait d'avoir des adjoints qui pussent rester pendant de longues années" (SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 14.177 (5), PVCD, 2.2.1962). **90.** "La nature de la diplomatie multilatérale détermine (...) un type d'agents diplomatiques" (SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 18.298 IX, 6, Letter from de Staercke to van den Bosch, Paris, 9.3.1963). **91.** This view is shared by Philippe de Schoutheete, who for many years was the Belgian Permanent Representative to the European Union (PHILIPPE DE SCHOUTHEETE, "Van der Meulen...", p. 354). **92.** Cf. SPFAE, AD, *Political File*, 18.298 IX 6, Letter from van den Bosch to de Staercke, Bruxelles, 4.2.1963.

made up of barely more than 300 agents, it would be difficult for the Foreign Ministry to suggest the possibility of specialising⁹³. Other countries did not have the same problem. In the 1960s, the Directorate for Economic and Financial Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay would launch a specific career path for "economic" or "community" diplomats⁹⁴.

Over the decades, certain Belgian diplomats like Paul Noterdaeme or Prosper Thuysbaert would become known as specialists in multilateralism, but even they would never receive special training in multilateral diplomacy. This was again pointed out by Prosper Thuysbaert in 1991: "Only rarely is any special preparation or training organised to help a beginner. It is thus through practice that you enter in multilateral diplomacy"⁹⁵.

V. Conclusion

From the end of the Second World War, the Foreign Ministry saw that change was afoot. While other ministries were increasing their contacts abroad, Belgium was also increasingly involved in forging alliances. The Ministry therefore responded to these changes by reminding the other ministries of the rules concerning relations with other countries, and by strengthening some services or creating new sections here and there. It did not react according to a properly thought-out plan

but reacted pragmatically to specific needs. Often however the response turned out to be inadequate, and a further reaction was soon needed. So, once again, the Ministry was forced to remind people of the rules – or to rewrite them. It strengthened another department, or altered its staffing structures once again. Indeed, for a long-standing institution it was quite flexible. In Brussels, there were a series of reorganisations; abroad, the Foreign Ministry opened more and more permanent representations. Nevertheless, until the end of the 1950s, there was no sign of a realisation that foreign policy had undergone a profound change. This was only natural as the multilateral revolution was totally unexpected. When Belgium committed itself to the Schuman Plan, it had no idea that it was taking the first step into a vast system which would bring about a lasting and definitive change in its foreign policy.

Inevitably, the Foreign Ministry and its officials came up against competition. In Brussels, several ministries opened their own departments to deal with international relations and turned towards the outside world while abroad, non-diplomats were given the most prestigious multilateral posts. This was not by chance. The Foreign Ministry needed the expertise of the other ministries. Moreover, at 8, *rue de la Loi*, not everyone was really in favour of such alliances anyway.

93. The Foreign Ministry had 298 diplomats in 1950, 326 in 1955 and 321 in 1960 (MARJORIE HOEFNAGELS, *Sekundaire analyse...*, p. 32). 94. LAURENT WARLOUZET, "Le Quai d'Orsay face au traité de Rome. La direction des affaires économiques et financières (DAEF) de 1957 à 1975", in LAURENCE BADEL, STANISLAS JEANNESSON, PIERS LUDLOW (eds.), *Les administrations nationales...*, p. 140. 95. "Il est rare qu'une préparation ou une formation particulière soient prévues pour initier un débutant. C'est donc pas la pratique qu'on 'entre en diplomatie multilatérale'" (PROSPER THUYSSBAERT, *L'art de la diplomatie multilatérale*, Bruxelles, 1991, p. 11).

Some of the responses of those in charge in the Ministry were close to the functionalist approach. A number of specialised services were opened, for example 'K' which had particular responsibilities for international organisations. Jean van den Bosch also headed down this path when he suggested the launching of a special career for multi-lateral diplomats. The objective in each of these cases was to strengthen the Foreign Ministry's hold on Belgium's external relations. This functionalist approach however was an illusion : the Ministry simply could not prevent other ministries becoming involved in the international arena. Furthermore, its low-level of resources – both human and financial – were a constant reminder of the limitations of this model. In 1960, Jean van den Bosch admitted publicly that his department was not in a position to respond adequately to all the requests for instructions coming from the permanent representations⁹⁶. This admission of weakness spoke volumes.

Functionalism, then, was not a viable option since the Belgian Foreign Ministry was simply not in a position to transform itself into a 'super-administration'. It could not retain a monopoly on Belgian external relations, nor have specialists at its disposal in all the necessary areas. The Ministry, facing stiff competition, had to focus most of its efforts

on coordination. This was more or less the approach taken during negotiation of the Treaty of Paris. In this same vein, the Ministry tried to ensure that the many initiatives being taken by the technical ministries towards the outside world actually had some unity of approach. Once again, however, this did not always work. Instead of true coordination, there was sometimes rivalry. Throughout the period under consideration, the Foreign Ministry was in regular conflict with the ministries responsible for Communications, Colonial Affairs and Agriculture. In respect of Europe, the toughest competition was with the Ministry of Economic Affairs. This was a traditional rivalry, also found in other countries. In the Netherlands, for example, in the context of both the ECSC and the Treaties of Rome, the Ministry of Economic Affairs challenged the position of the Foreign Ministry and claimed responsibility for all European economic policy⁹⁷. In Germany in 1953, the Foreign Trade departments of the Ministry of Economic Affairs were transferred to the *Auswärtiges Amt*. Four years later, however, responsibility for issues relating to European economic integration would be handed back⁹⁸. The message was clear : at this time of radical change, the administrations responsible for external relations were under threat. Unless they changed their ways, they would lose their power.

96. JEAN VAN DEN BOSCH, "La représentation extérieure de la Belgique", in *Revue générale belge*, 1.1961, p. 54. 97. ALBERT KERSTEN, "Een woud van verandering. Ontwikkeling van taak en organisatie van het ministerie", in REINA VAN DITSHUYZEN (e.a.) (dir.), *Tweehonderd jaar Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*, Den Haag, 1998, p. 72-73; JAN-WILLEM BROUWER, "La coordination par la concertation. L'élaboration de la politique européenne des Pays-Bas et le fonctionnement de la représentation permanente à Bruxelles dans les années 1960", in L. BADEL, S. JEANNESSON, P. LUDLOW (eds.), *Les administrations nationales...*, p. 357. 98. CLAUDIA HIEPEL, "Le ministère ouest-allemand des Affaires étrangères et l'intégration européenne, des origines à 1974", in L. BADEL, S. JEANNESSON, P. LUDLOW (eds.), *Les administrations nationales...*, p. 243.

In this respect, we should once again emphasise the lack of real thought given to the potential impact of multilateralism on the role and functioning of the Ministry. The Ministry did not consciously *choose* the ways in which it responded to the challenges which the international situation presented. Structures adapted to events with varying degrees of success.

Aside from the institutional structures, however, it is also worth examining the individuals responsible for forming Belgian foreign policy. Interestingly, the Second World War had coincided with a fresh weakening of the role played by the Head of State in this area⁹⁹. King Baudouin would always show a particular interest in international affairs¹⁰⁰. Nevertheless, he would have even less power than his predecessors to implement his own policies¹⁰¹. One notable reason for this was the trauma resulting from the so-called 'Royal Question' (the political crisis relating to whether King Leopold should return to the throne after his behavior during the Second World War). The delegations of national sovereignty, induced by multilateralism, also weakened the position of the head of State in the foreign policy. Given this context, the long-

running reservations expressed by the Palace towards European integration were hardly surprising¹⁰².

Quite apart from the role of the Head of State, the diversification and increasing complexity of the issues dealt with at international level led to an increase in the number of individuals and authorities involved in foreign policy. This resulted in further conflicts between individuals, departments and ministries over the exact responsibilities of each. Among those to benefit greatly from these changes were the so-called 'technical' departments and ministries which became increasingly involved in formulating Belgian external policy. As well as official structures, however, there were also individuals who benefited from the new situation. This was the case for a number of 'experts' who were now able, irrespective of their administrative background, to deal directly with their foreign counterparts and could even negotiate international treaties. Thierry Grosbois and Yves Stelandre have already highlighted the important role played by 'individuals' in the development of foreign – and European – policy in Belgium. They explained this above all by the relative instability of the government¹⁰³. The increasing technical

99. The power of the King in the field of foreign policy diminished gradually in Belgium. In fact, the First World War had already been an important turning-point in this respect (see, in particular, MICHAEL AUWERS, *The Island and the Storm. A Social-Cultural History of the Belgian Diplomatic Corps in Times of Democratization, 1885-1935*, dissertation for the degree of Doctor in History, University of Antwerp, 2014, p. 561-562). 100. VINCENT DUJARDIN, *Pierre Harmel*, Bruxelles, 2004, p. 344. 101. JEAN STENGERS, *L'action du Roi en Belgique depuis 1831. Pouvoir et influence*, Bruxelles, 2008, p. 277 et 283; RIK COOLSMAET, *La politique extérieure de la Belgique...*, p. 62. 102. VINCENT DUJARDIN, "Baudouin", in ACADEMIE ROYALE DES SCIENCES, DES LETTRES ET DES BEAUX-ARTS DE BELGIQUE, *Nouvelle Biographie Nationale*, vol. 10, Bruxelles, 2010, p. 24-25. 103. THIERRY GROSBOIS & YVES STELANDRE, "Belgian Decision-Makers and European Unity, 1945-63", in ANNE DEIGHTON (ed.), *Building Postwar Europe. National Decision-Makers and European Institutions, 1948-63*, New-York, 1995, p. 127-140. Cf., in particular p. 128 and 132.

complexity of the subjects dealt with¹⁰⁴, the vagueness surrounding the attribution of certain responsibilities and the difficulties encountered by the official bodies in adapting to the new circumstances are also possible explanations for the significant influence of certain officials¹⁰⁵. Snoy, de Staercke and Van der Meulen were neither diplomats, nor even from the Foreign Ministry. Nevertheless, having proved themselves through their individual talents and using the contacts they themselves had built up, they soon emerged as the new brains behind Belgian external policy in the 1950s.

During this period, the role of the Foreign Ministry was visibly being eroded. Even the presence of leading figures like Paul van Zeeland and Paul-Henri Spaak – two former

Prime Ministers – was not enough to entirely maintain its influence. Ministers, after all, rely not so much on structures but rather on individuals, regardless of their administrative background.

Even within the Ministry, there were changes in the balance of power between individuals. Traditional ‘bilateralists’ and old-school diplomats were increasingly viewed as men of the past¹⁰⁶. Younger officials, such as Juan Cassiers, Paul Noterdaeme, Philippe de Schoutheete and Etienne Davignon, understood that times were changing and studied the ways of multilateralism in their day-to-day work. They were already beginning to stand out as the future heavyweights of Belgian diplomacy¹⁰⁷.

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104. The highly technical nature of some subjects explains the relative autonomy given to the officials responsible for multilateral negotiations. This phenomenon was not limited to Belgium, nor specific to the emergence of multilateralism, as more recent research has shown (GUIDO DIERICKX, “De Euro-Belgische ambtenaren. Een paradoxale prestatie”, in *Res Publica*, 1998, vol. XL, n°. 2, p. 221). **105.** This was not something only true of Belgium, as is shown, in particular, by the various research projects examining the role played by national administrations in European integration. Cf. In particular, L. BADEL, S. JEANNESSON, P. LUDLOW (eds.), *Les administrations nationales...*; GÉRARD BOSSUAT, “The French Administrative Elite and the Unification of Western Europe, 1947-58”, in ANNE DEIGHTON, *Building Postwar Europe...*, p. 21-37. **106.** RIK COOLSAET, *La politique extérieure de la Belgique...*, p. 148-149. **107.** Cassiers, Noterdaeme and de Schoutheete joined the Ministry in 1956. The first of these was, amongst others, the Belgian Permanent Representative to NATO (1983-87), the second held the same post at the UN in New York (1987-94) and the third became Permanent Representative to the European Union (1987-97). Etienne Davignon, who joined the Foreign Ministry in 1959, was *Chef de Cabinet* to the Minister (1964-69), before becoming Director-General for Political Affairs (1969-76).

Table of Abbreviations

AA	<i>Archives africaines</i>
AD	<i>Archives diplomatiques</i>
AGR	<i>Archives générales du Royaume</i>
AJDF	<i>Archives Jacques Delvaux de Fenffe</i>
APC	<i>Annales parlementaires Chambre des Représentants</i>
CEPAG	<i>Commission belge pour l'étude des problèmes de l'après-guerre</i>
PPvZ	<i>Papiers Paul van Zeeland</i>
PVCD	<i>Procès-verbaux du conseil de direction</i>
PVCM	<i>Procès-verbaux du conseil des ministres</i>
SPFAE	<i>Service public fédéral Affaires étrangères</i>