

Insa Meinen : the Persecution of the Jews in Belgium through a German Lens

Lieven Saerens

Insa Meinen's research in the context of Belgian historiography

Insa Meinen, a German historian who has been living in Belgium for a long time and is affiliated with the Carl von Ossietzky University in Oldenburg, has been conducting research on the Jewish persecution in Belgium for many years. All of her years of research culminated in her book *Die Shoah in Belgien* (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), also published in Dutch and French in 2011 and 2012, resulting in considerable media attention⁴.

Compared to other Western European countries, Belgian scholarly research on Jewish persecution started rather late. The majority of the few initial works of the 1960s and 1970s lacked any scholarly basis, or were produced by amateur historians⁵. In these works, Belgium was incorrectly presented as a highly hospitable country which had taken every effort to save its Jewish population, and the Belgian establishment was applauded.

L'étoile et le fusil (Bruxelles, 1983-1984, three volumes), the *magnum opus* of Brussels historian Maxime Steinberg, was a watershed work with an enormous impact in the Francophone part of Belgium. This work signaled a change in the historiography on the Jewish persecution in Belgium. Steinberg presented the first global and integrated history of the Judeocide in Belgium. He described the mechanisms of the 'Endlösung' with ample attention to the German occupier. He also paid attention to Belgian collaborationists and Belgian public authorities. Furthermore, he stressed the important presence of Jews in the resistance and was attentive to the experiences of the helpless victims, of which his own mother was one⁶. He also made clear that of the approximately 58,000 Jews residing in Belgium at that time, the vast majority (approximately 90%) lived in the greater Antwerp and Brussels urban areas. The remainder of Belgian Jews (approximately 3,000 individuals) resided, for the most part, in the larger Charleroi and Liège urban areas. The first deportation convoys departed from the Dossin Barracks in Mechelen to the 'East' on 4 August 1942. About 45% of the Jews residing on Belgian territory in 1940 would be deported throughout the war.

At the end of the 1990s, Steinberg's work was followed by additional scholarly publi-

4. *De Shoah in België*, Antwerpen, De Bezige Bij, 2011; *La Shoah en Belgique*, Bruxelles, Renaissance du Livre, 2012. 5. See the study written by Antwerp amateur historian EPHRAÏM SCHMIDT, *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Antwerpen*, Antwerpen, 1963 (translated in French: ID., *L'histoire des Juifs à Anvers*, Anvers, 1969); the work of Brussels sociologist BETTY GARFINKELS, *Les belges face à la persécution raciale, 1940-1944*, Bruxelles, 1965; the work of French historian LUCIEN STEINBERG, *Le Comité de défense des Juifs en Belgique*, Bruxelles, 1973. See also: BETTY GARFINKELS, *Belgique, terre d'accueil. Problème du réfugié, 1933-1940*, Bruxelles, 1974. 6. LIEVEN SAERENS, "Decease of Maxime Steinberg, historian of the persecution of the Jews in Belgium", 9.8.2010 (http://www.cegesoma.be/cms/archivage2010_en.php?article=1486); INSA MEINEN, "Maxime Steinberg – Brussels, 1936-2010", in *Yad Vashem Studies*, 2011, no. 1, p. 15-30.

cations on the seizure of Jewish goods by order of the Belgian government⁷, and by my own book *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad* (“Aliens in a globalized city”) tackling the anti-Semitic attitudes prevalent within Antwerp during the period 1880-1944⁸. This work unearthed and analysed the far-reaching collaboration of the Antwerp city authorities during the Jewish persecution, a collaboration that went even further than Steinberg had suspected. This book also pointed out the remarkably high number of deportees in Antwerp, as compared to Brussels, Liège and Charleroi. Following Steinberg’s analysis, my book also observed the refusal of Brussels authorities to distribute the yellow star of David and to offer police cooperation to assist in the round-up of Jews. In contrast, the Antwerp and Charleroi city

authorities did distribute the star of David, and in Antwerp the city police actively participated in the round-up of the Jews. These and other studies gradually increased the interest of both Belgian political authorities as well as Belgian Jewish communities in the role of Belgian authorities during the persecution of the Jews. In 2004, the Belgian Senate ordered an historical study to investigate the alleged responsibility of Belgian authorities in the Jewish persecution. This task was given to the Belgian federal research institute Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society (CEGES-SOMA, Brussels). It resulted in a report and a publication in 2007, released in French and Dutch, with the revealing title *Docile Belgium*⁹. The book generated national and

7. *De Bezittingen van de slachtoffers van de Jodenvervolging in België. Spoliatie – Rechtsherstel. Bevindingen van de Studiecommissie*, uitg. Diensten van de Eerste Minister, Brussels, 2001. Also in French translation : *Les Biens des victimes des persécutions anti-juives en Belgique. Spoliation – Rétablissement des droits. Résultats de la Commission d’étude*, Bruxelles, ed. Services du Premier Ministre, 2001. 8. LIEVEN SAERENS, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad. Een geschiedenis van Antwerpen en zijn Joodse bevolking (1880-1944)*, Tielt, 2000. Translated in French : ID., *Étrangers dans la cité. Anvers et ses Juifs (1880-1944)*, Bruxelles, 2005. 9. RUDI VAN DOORSLAER (ed.), EMMANUEL DEBRUYNE, FRANK SEBERECHTS, NICO WOUTERS & LIEVEN SAERENS, *Gewillig België. Overheid en Jodenvervolging tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Antwerpen/Brussel, 2007; ID., *La Belgique docile. Les autorités belges et la persécution des Juifs en Belgique durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Bruxelles, 2007. The first English scholarly study : DAN MICHMAN (ed.), *Belgium and the Holocaust : Jews, Belgians, Germans*, Jerusalem, 1998. Other studies had been published, for example, on the Association of Jews in Belgium, or VJB : RUDI VAN DOORSLAER & JEAN-PHILIPPE SCHREIBER (eds.), *De curatoren van het getto. De Vereniging van de joden in België tijdens de nazi-bezetting*, Tielt, 2004; also in French translation : ID., *Les curateurs du ghetto. L’Association des Juifs en Belgique sous l’occupation nazie*, Bruxelles, 2004; a synthesizing study : MAXIME STEINBERG, *La persécution des Juifs en Belgique (1940-1945)*, Bruxelles, 2004, on the mass plundering of Jewish property : ERIC LAUREYS, *Meesters van het diamant. De Belgische diamantsector tijdens het nazibewind*, Tielt, 2005; see also : ID. “The plundering of Antwerp’s Jewish diamond dealers, 1940-1944”, in *Confiscation of Jewish property in Europe, 1933-1945 : New sources and perspectives. Symposium proceedings. United States Holocaust Museum*, Washington (DC), 2003, p. 57-74 on the Jewish education system : BARBARA DICKSCHEN, *L’école en sursis. La scolarisation des enfants juifs pendant la guerre*, Bruxelles, 2006. Also in 2007, there were publications on the experiences of Jewish children : HANNE HELLEMANS, *Schimmen met een ster. Het bewogen verhaal van joodse ondergedoken kinderen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België*, Antwerpen, 2007; on the Brussels police during World War II : BENOÎT MAJERUS, *Occupations et logiques policières. La police bruxelloise en 1914-1918 en 1940-1945.* – Académie Royale de Belgique. Classe

international media attention, had a political impact in Belgium itself, and gained the attention of both the American and Israeli embassies¹⁰. In sum, after the aforementioned shift in Belgian historiography, this particular work also placed the Judeocide in Belgium on the political agenda after it had been neglected for decades. This societal shift would result in what one could call a 'culture of apology' after 2000 in Belgium, as well as the opening in November 2012 of a Holocaust museum in Mechelen, by order of the Flemish government.

Meinen's 2009 book therefore arrived in a specific context : right in the middle of this strongly increased attention towards the issue of 'Belgian responsibility' in the persecution of the Jews. In her study, Meinen starts by saying that she regrets the fact that in Belgian historiography the cooperation of Belgians in the Jewish persecution

has gained centre stage. According to her, this does great injustice to the history of the Judeocide in Belgium. This is why she aims her focus on the acts of the Germans, all the more because, according to Meinen, "there has hardly been any attention to this in German research literature until recently" (p. 242)¹¹. However, it is difficult to call Meinen's focus innovative after Raul Hilberg's watershed 1961 work *The destruction of the European Jews*. Hilberg fundamentally enlarged the concept of who the perpetrators were, with his deeply influential statement that the machinery of destruction was interwoven into German society as a whole¹². Another initial focal point of Meinen's study is the spontaneous rescue attempts of individual Jews, attempts that were not related to the organized resistance. In order to do this, she conducted in-depth research on over 5,000 Jews deported from Belgium.

des Lettres, Bruxelles 2007, on the Belgian antisemitic collaborationists of the Flemish SS : LIEVEN SAERENS, *De Jodenjagers van de Vlaamse SS. Gewone Vlamingen?*, Tielt, 2007; on the attitudes of the Catholics and Protestants : ID., "The Attitude of the Belgian Catholic Church towards the Persecution of Jews" and ID., "The General Attitude of the Protestant Churches in Belgium Regarding the Jews (from the end of the 19th century to the Second World War)", in LIEVE GEVERS & JAN BANKS (eds.), *Religion under Siege*, respectively in *Volume I : The Roman Catholic Church in Occupied Europe (1939-1950)*, p. 243-281, and *Volume II : Protestant, Orthodox and Muslim Communities in Occupied Europe (1939-1950)*, 265-281 (Louvain/Paris/Dudley, MA, 2007); a synthesizing study : WARD ADRIAENS, MAXIME STEINBERG, LAURENCE SCHRAM, PATRICIA RAMET, ERIC HAUTERMAN & ILSE MARQUENIE, *Mechelen -, Auschwitz. 1942-1944. 28 transporten, 18 522 portretten. 28 stransports, 18 522 portraits. 28 transports, 18 522 portraits*, 4 volumes, Mechelen, 2008; on Liège : THIERRY ROZENBLUM, *Une cité si ardente... Les Juifs de Liège sous l'Occupation (1940-1944)*, Liège, 2010; see the English summary at : <http://www.dannes-camiers.org/01142/fr/Le-livre>. Non-Belgian publications on aid to Jews include : DAN MICHMAN (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous among the Nations : Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust : Belgium*, Jerusalem, 2005; MARC-ANDRÉ CHARGUÉRAUD, *Survivre. Français, Belges, Hollandais et Danois face à la Shoah. 1940-1945*, Paris, 2006; SUZANNE VROMEN, *Hidden Children of the Holocaust : Belgian Nuns and their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis*, Oxford/New York, 2008; BOB MOORE, *Survivors. Jewish Self-Help and Rescue in Nazi-Occupied Western Europe*, Oxford/New York, 2010 and on Belgian law vs. the persecution of the Jews : DAVID FRASER, *The Fragility of Law : Constitutional Patriotism and the Jews of Belgium, 1940-1945*, Abingdon, 2009. **10.** LIEVEN SAERENS, "Ceges/Soma-study 'La Belgique docile' in Wikileaks" (http://www.cegesoma.be/cms/index_en.php?article=1862). **11.** Original quotation : "in de Duitse onderzoeksliteratuur tot voor kort nauwelijks aandacht voor was". **12.** CHRISTOPHER R. BROWNING, "Raul Hilberg" and RAUL HILBERG, "The Development of Holocaust Research : A Personal Overview", in *Yad Vashem Studies*, 2007, vol. 1, p. 2-20 and 21-33.

Meinen has done an impressive job. Her work contains several new insights and further clarifies previously known facts. She also offers regular comparisons with the Dutch and French cases. On a local level, the comparison between Antwerp and Brussels is a recurrent issue. In contrast, Liège and Charleroi are mostly absent from her research. However, Meinen's often confrontational and one-sided approach, in which the role of the Belgians is minimized, opens her up to criticism. Meinen never passes up the opportunity to bring alleged mistakes in earlier studies to the fore. Obviously, any improvement in our knowledge is to be welcomed, but in many cases she addresses factual details that do not undermine the fundamental analysis of those earlier studies in any way. By using this systematically confrontational mode, Meinen creates a rhetoric which tends to suggest that her own analysis is the 'sole truth,' and that the Germans were the only real perpetrators. In a certain sense, one could say that Meinen's work ties in to some kind of 'Belgian Goldhagen debate'. Many reviewers seemed to have followed Meinen in this approach, which led some to conclude that Belgium, contrary to the conclusion of the CEGES-SOMA report, was 'not so docile' after all. To put things simplistically : it was the Nazi occupiers who bore the brunt of responsibility in regards to the persecution of the Jews. "In Belgium, the Jewish genocide was a German history"¹³ was how one newspaper headline

put it, or as another headline read : "The Shoah wasn't that Belgian after all"¹⁴. Meinen's one-sided approach brings us back to where we were decades ago, ignoring one essential question : why did democracy fail in, an albeit occupied, Belgium?

In this essay we will focus on several key elements of this discussion¹⁵.

The relationship between the *Militärverwaltung* and the Sipo-SD

Contrary to the Netherlands, occupied Belgium was governed by a *Militärverwaltung*, that also controlled the north of France. In her chapter "Occupation, collaboration and Jewish persecution" Meinen tackles the relationship between the German *Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst* (Sipo-SD) and the *Militärverwaltung* – one of the recurring points in her research – as well as the distribution of the star of David and the question of the arrests, to which she pays a special interest in other chapters.

Meinen shows that the role of the *Militärverwaltung* in the persecution of the Jews was much more important than we assumed thus far, more important even than Steinberg suggested. The Sipo-SD (the *Beauftragter des Chefs der Sipo-SD*, BdS) fell under the personal command of *Militärverwaltungschef* Eggert Reeder, who also

13. Original quotation : "En Belgique, le génocide juif fut une histoire allemande" (Interview of Insa Meinen by Pascal Martin, in *Le Soir*, 17.10.2012). **14.** Original quotation : "La Shoah finalement pas si belge que ça" (Interview of Insa Meinen by Christian Laporte, in *La Libre Belgique*, 3.10.2012). See also : M[ARIE]-C[ÉCILE] R[OYEN], "Insa Meinen. 'La collaboration a été plus importante à Anvers qu'à Bruxelles'. L'historienne allemande Insa Meinen jette un éclairage nouveau sur la Shoah en Belgique et ceux qui l'ont permise. Une étape décisive de la recherche, qui bouscule les idées reçues", in *Le Vif*, 28.9.2012, p. 37. **15.** All the pages mentioned in this essay refer to the Dutch edition of Meinen's book.

held the title of *SS-Brigadeführer* and later *SS-Gruppenführer*. For the deportation of both the Jews and resistance fighters to the Breendonk camp (resorting under the *Militärverwaltung* after May 1942) as well as the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz, the Sipo-SD depended on the approval of the *Militärverwaltung*. Nevertheless, as the author also stresses, the *Militärverwaltung* never had any fundamental differences of opinion with the BdS: “on the contrary, a ‘harmonious’ cooperation developed” (p. 20)¹⁶. As we already knew from earlier research by historians such as Steinberg, there was mutual cooperation between the Sipo-Sd and the *Feldgendarmerie* and *Geheime Feldpolizei*, both under the command of the *Militärverwaltung*.

Dutch historians Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller conclude in their comparative research of Western European countries that the different nature of the occupation regimes in the Netherlands and France did not have a significant influence on the number of deportees, because at the start of the occupation the SS possessed exclusive jurisdiction with regard to the deportations¹⁷. Meinen concludes that things were somewhat different in Belgium: “Here the relatively weak SS-apparatus and the dominance of the *Militärverwaltung* made sure [that] the deportations to Auschwitz occurred without too many problems, in most cases”¹⁸.

The distribution of the star of David and the opposition of the Brussels authorities

Meinen calls the implementation of the mandatory star of David in June 1942 the “beginning of the actual persecution”. As previous research already indicated, the Brussels Conference of the nineteen Mayors sent a letter of protest against this German decree because “it is so openly in conflict with the value of every human being, whomever he might be”¹⁹. The Conference also refused to distribute the ‘Jewish star’. Meinen discovered that this well-known letter had already been drafted on 4 June 1942, which proves that, contrary to what was written in Docile Belgium, the composition of this letter of protest was not occasioned by a serious political incident one day later, when the *Feldgendarmerie*, under the cloak of a routine action, had used sixty Brussels police agents in the arrest of former members of the Belgian military. The Brussels protest inspired the Liège city government to also refuse the distribution of the star of David.

With this refusal, the Brussels Conference of Mayors, with Brussels mayor Jules Coelst acting as its president and spokesman, diverged from the so-called ‘policy of the lesser evil’. It was in the context of this policy that Belgian municipal authorities had become involved in the execution of the anti-Jewish decrees and that Jews, including Jews in Brussels, had been registered. In 1942, however, moral considerations seemed to prevail. The

16. Original quotation: “Er ontstond integendeel een ‘harmonische’ samenwerking”. 17. PIM GRIFFIOEN & RON ZELLER, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België 1940-1945. Overeenkomsten, verschillen, oorzaken*, Amsterdam, 2011. 18. Original quotation from p. 240: “Hier zorgde het relatief zwakke SS-apparaat en het overwicht van de *Militärverwaltung* ervoor dat de deportaties naar Auschwitz in de meeste gevallen zonder problemen verliepen”.

19. Original quotation: “die zo openlijk in strijd is met de waarde van iedere mens, wie hij ook is”.

Conference of Mayors transcended the policy of the lesser evil in another sense, as well : they did not limit their defense to Belgian Jews (a minority of approximately 7% of the wider population) but also included foreign Jews. Equally remarkable was that although the Conference used arguments of a moral nature, the Germans accepted the refusal. In most cases, the Germans only listened to judicial arguments²⁰.

Meinen justifiably remarks that it is not of major importance to ask questions about the motivation behind this refusal by the Brussels Mayors, “what really matters is how they acted”²¹. Nevertheless, she should have paid somewhat more attention to the complexity and the context of the event. Despite his refusal to co-operate with the persecution of the Jews, the attitude of Jules Coelst with regard to the Jews remains ambiguous. As a representative of the Catholic commercial middle class before the war, he was noted as having made numerous xenophobic and anti-Jewish statements, and he was actively involved in a middle class organization sympathizing with New Order ideas, something which Meinen fails to remark upon. In that sense, Coelst was a typical representative of certain conservative Catholics who during the occupation found it necessary to defend the Jews, partly on the basis of patriotic, anti-German motives. Juxtaposed against Coelst’s position was that of the wartime mayor of Antwerp Léon

Delwaide, someone who like Coelst was also a Catholic who had been known for his anti-Jewish and xenophobic attitudes before the war, attitudes which in his case continued during the occupation, a fact which Meinen also fails to remark upon.

Coelst’s ambiguity can be clearly read from his wartime diary²². Usually, Coelst’s reports on events are objective and rather dry. Not so, however, when he treats the issue of “the distribution of the star of David to the Jews”. Ostentatiously, he begins to state “I am inclined to refuse,” only to immediately add : “Frankly, I have no particular love for the Israelites as a community”²³. This is followed by several statements against the Jews, in particular against German and Polish Jews. The day after drafting the notorious letter of protest, Coelst went to the Brussels *Oberfeldkommandantur* (OFK), where he proposed to “let the Jews themselves make sure the distribution is implemented since they have their own association” (the German-imposed Association of Jews in Belgium, or in Dutch : *Vereniging der Joden in België* or VJB)²⁴. Some Jewish VJB-representatives were dismayed when they found out about this suggestion. For their part, they refused to distribute the star of David, as well. Mayor Coelst found this hard to understand, as he confided to his diary : “This puts me in a difficult position. I thought to do them a favour and here they come and protest”²⁵. Coelst also

20. HERMAN VAN GOETHEM, “La convention de La Haye, la collaboration administrative en Belgique et la persécution des Juifs à Anvers, 1940-1942”, in *Cahiers d’Histoire du Temps Présent*, no. 17, 2006, p. 117-198. 21. Original quotation : “wat telt is hoe zij handelden” (p. 35). 22. *Mémoires de guerre de Jules Coelst à l’hôtel de ville de Bruxelles pendant la guerre. Mai 1940-septembre 1942* (CEGES-SOMA, AB 2421). 23. Original quotations : “Je suis d’avis d’y refuser” and “À dire vrai, je n’aime pas d’un amour immodéré les Israélites en tant que communauté”. 24. Original quotation : “de charger les Juifs eux-mêmes de la distribution envisagée et qui possèdent une association”. 25. Original quotation : “Me voilà dans de jolis draps. Je croyais leur être agréable et voici qu’ils se rebiffent”.

seemed no stranger to a certain opportunistic attitude. Belgian historians are well aware of the testimony that VJB-representative Maurice Benedictus gave to Belgian state security officers in 1943 in Lisbon. In this testimony, Benedictus said that Coelst, when answering the question of why Brussels had protested against the distribution of the 'Jewish star', but had previously implemented the Jewish registry, had stated: "Because at that time we were not yet sure of the British victory"²⁶. Meinen ignores any kind of information of this nature.

Meinen does give a clear overview of the specific attitude of Brussels authorities with regard to the arrests ordered by the occupying power. As we know from the work of Luxembourg historian Benoît Majerus²⁷, as early as 1941 the Brussels public prosecutor gave the Brussels police the unambiguous order to refuse all German orders to implement arrests. This was followed by a similar, equally unambiguous instruction by Mayor Coelst, in his capacity as the head of the local administrative police. This was a general instruction on the arrest of Jews as well as non-Jews, and also made no distinction between foreign or Belgian Jews. This resulted in the refusal by the Brussels police to follow German orders to arrest Jews in early July 1942 as well as early September 1942. As we already noted, this attitude stood in sharp contrast with the cooperative attitude of the Antwerp authorities and police.

Meinen concludes that the Brussels refusal "turned out to be an insurmountable obstacle for the representatives of the National Socialist police state"²⁸. Meinen does not deny that despite all the efforts of municipal authorities in Brussels, several Brussels police agents were actively involved in several individual arrests of Jews. She refers to three examples given by historian Nico Wouters in *Docile Belgium*. However, she dismisses these incidents as exceptions, and also notes that only one case dealt with a direct arrest by the Brussels police.

To me, it seems important to explicitly bring attention to the fact that, although the Brussels local authorities twice refused to cooperate with a large round-up of Jews, they were never sanctioned or punished in any way, let alone threatened with deportation to the Breendonk camp or a German concentration camp. I believe that this puts into perspective the threat of the Sipo-SD made to the Antwerp police commissioners, who were faced with imprisonment in Breendonk if they refused to execute the third large round-up of 28 August 1942. The Germans certainly offered some leeway to the Brussels authorities, in which the latter could refuse to follow orders without any German sanctions. Moreover, the Brussels authorities sent a powerful signal with this refusal, to their subordinates as well as to the general populace. I believe it is safe to say that it is partly thanks to the attitude of the Brussels authorities that so many Jews in Brussels survived the occupation. Meinen

26. Original quotation: "Car à ce moment ils n'étaient pas aussi certains de la victoire anglaise!". [MAURICE BENEDECTUS, *Historique du problème juif en Belgique depuis le 10 mai 1940 jusqu'au 21 décembre 1942*, Lisbon, 1943 (CEGES-SOMA, *Archief Salomon Ullmann*, mic 41)]. **27.** BENOÎT MAJERUS, "Logiques administratives et persécution anti-juive. La police bruxelloise et les arrestations de 1942", in *Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent*, no. 12, 2003, p. 181-217. **28.** Original quotation p. 240: "bleek voor de vertegenwoordigers van de nationaal-socialistische politiestaat een onoverkomelijke hindernis".

does not address these issues, or she holds a differing view, for example when it comes to the Breendonk threat (p. 240).

The developments of the arrests : manhunt and the cooperation of the Antwerp authorities

In the chapter entitled “How were the Jews arrested in Belgium”²⁹, Meinen focuses on certain important German actors who until now have hardly received any attention in historical research : first of all the *Devisenschutzkommando* (DSK) and to a lesser extent also the customs police, the *Grenzwachregiment Clüver* that operated on the Belgian-Dutch border and the German custom services who guarded the border with France³⁰. None of these agencies were integrated within the structures of the SS. Meinen also sheds some light on the question of cooperation between German and Belgian authorities with regard to the number of arrests, in which the case of Antwerp is once again contrasted against the Brussels case.

Here, Meinen wants to fill gaps in our knowledge. Thus far, historical research has given too much attention to the period of August-October 1942, during which time a number of key events occurred : the ‘voluntary registrations’ based on the calls for the *Arbeitseinsatz* and the large round-ups in Antwerp, Brussels, Liège and Charleroi, as well as the round-ups of September 1943 of the Jews in possession of Belgian citizenship. According to Meinen’s calculations, all these deportees amounted to less than half of the

number of Jews deported from Belgium. Meinen wonders how Jews were arrested during the rest of the occupation and how they were tracked. She mentions “thousands of individual actions” in which Jews were arrested in small groups or individually, which in any case make up more than half of the Jewish deportees from Belgium. Belgium diverges from France and the Netherlands on this point. Meinen also investigates who arrested the Jews and how Jews tried to hide.

Meinen concludes that the role of the Belgian police was much less important than earlier research would lead us to believe. What the author primarily means is that the majority of Antwerp Jews were not arrested by the Antwerp police. She is correct in making this statement. However, the way in which she constructs her argument suggests that earlier research had stated the opposite, which is quite simply not true. Every serious researcher can count. Meinen herself proposed the number of approximately 4,300 Jews – “about one fifth” (18%) of the total number of 24,906 Jews deported from Belgium – as the number of Jews who were arrested during the occupation by Belgian authorities. This includes the four large Antwerp round-ups of August-September 1942, the individual arrests, the transfer of Jews from prisons or refugee camps and the total number of ‘*Atlantikwall*-Jews’ who were deported to Auschwitz. Dutch historians Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller come to the same number³¹. Meinen is also correct when she notes that Belgian authorities in Antwerp

29. See also : INSA MEINEN, “Facing Deportation : How Jews were Arrested in Belgium”, in *Yad Vashem Studies*, 2008, no. 1, p. 39-72. 30. See also Meinen, p. 270 note 16 and ID., “Die Deportation der Juden aus Belgien und das Devisenschutzkommando”, in JOHANNES HÜRTER & JÜRGEN ZARUSKY (eds.), *Besatzung, Kollaboration, Holocaust. Neue Studien zur Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden*, München, 2008, p. 45-79. 31. PIM GRIFFIOEN & RON ZELLER, *Jodenvervolgung in Nederland, Frankrijk en België...*, p. 534;

never took autonomous initiatives, contrary to France, where a minimum number of 61% of the Jews were arrested solely or primarily by regular French police units³². Yet the fact that the Antwerp police never took autonomous initiatives had already been stressed in both *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad* and in *Docile Belgium*³³.

Meinen fails to place the attitude of the Antwerp police in a broader picture. The actions of the police, however, had far-reaching consequences. In June 1942, the Antwerp police also cooperated with the deportation of Jewish men to the north of France, where they had to work on the *Atlantikwall*. Most of them were husbands and fathers. This deportation was – as Meinen stresses – not an initiative of the Sipo-SD, but of the *Militärverwaltung*. A total number of 2,552 Jews were taken to the north of France, of which no less than 1,526 (approximately 68%) came from the larger Antwerp urban areas. In autumn 1942, it was again the *Militärverwaltung* who delivered these ‘*Atlantikwall*-Jews’ to the Sipo-SD for deportation to the ‘East’. At least 1,245 Antwerp ‘*Atlantikwall*-Jews’ were deported via Mechelen, and at least 26 were deported via Drancy (France) to Auschwitz. At least seven others ended up in concentration camps and at least 22 of them died before deportation³⁴.

In contrast to her earlier research, Meinen does include those *Atlantikwall*-Jews in her

statistics on Jewish casualties caused by the Antwerp police and city authorities. However, she forgets one thing : due to the fact that these Jewish household heads were put into mandatory labour in the north of France, many Jewish mothers found themselves alone with their children during the round-ups. More importantly, my own research confirms that solitary mothers in this position were much less inclined to move or go into hiding with their children. Families like this were easy prey, which lead to a higher number of deportations, notably higher even than the local Antwerp average number. Because of its active cooperation in the deportation of *Atlantikwall*-Jews, in the long term the Antwerp police had ensured that 1,000 to 1,500 families in Antwerp were basically held hostage³⁵.

The cooperation of the Antwerp authorities and police also influenced the potential number of Antwerp bystanders that were prepared to offer help to their Jewish neighbours. Meinen still seems to refuse to acknowledge this. Sociological and historical research, such as the research of Ian Kershaw and Samuel and Pearl Oliner³⁶, indicates that most bystanders were inclined to help only after being asked by authoritative group of leaders whose norms and values they shared. Unlike Brussels, Antwerp lacked this positive example group of leaders who could inspire the community to aid Jews. The consequence was less help for

32. *Idem*, p. 498. 33. As Meinen also remarks, Maxime Steinberg does make the comparison with France in *Un pays occupé et ses juifs. Belgique entre France et Pays-Bas*, (Gerpennes, 1998). 34. Based on our biographical analysis of the *Directie-Generaal Oorlogsslachtoffers* in Brussels (*Alfabetische lijst van 1.518 (LS) 'Atlantikwall-Joden' uit Groot-Antwerpen*, no. TR. 146.710). 35. LIEVEN SAERENS, “De Jodenvervolging in België in cijfers”, in *Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent*, no. 17, 2006, p. 231-234. 36. AN KERSHAW, “The persecution of the Jews and German Popular Opinion in the Third Reich”, in HELEN FEIN (ed.), *The Persisting Question : Sociological Perspectives and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism*, Berlin/New York, 1987, p. 317-352; SAMUEL P. & PEARL M. OLINER, *The Altruistic Personality : Rescuers of Jews in Europe*, Macmillan, 1988.

Jews by the local population and probably a higher level of denunciation. Antwerp had the example of looking the other way; Brussels, the example of positive inspiration³⁷.

Antwerp vs. Brussels

As stated earlier, Meinen tackles the contrast between Brussels and Antwerp in a chapter entitled “Manhunt” (*Mensenjacht*). She poses the valid question of whether the difference, a gap of approximately 28% of deported Jews between Antwerp and Brussels, was “really that great”. She refers to the numbers presented in my research, which were based on an analysis of the preserved data files of the VJB, showing that 65% and 37% respectively of the Jewish populations in Antwerp and Brussels were supposed to be deported. “The most important problem”, writes Meinen, “is the fact that Saerens grounds his calculation on a mere 60 % of the Jews deported from Belgium and that the registry of the VJB he uses, which is only partially preserved, contains an under-representation of Brussels Jews”³⁸. Meinen clarifies this in an endnote (p. 284-285, note 10) : “Saerens’ calculation includes 85% of registered Jews in Antwerp and 53% of all registered Jews in Brussels”³⁹.

Far from wanting to suggest that my numbers are ‘untouchable’, they nevertheless demonstrate clear trends. No expert on statistics will dare claim that one has to

involve an entire populace in an analysis. Dutch political sociologist Robert Braun, who is currently conducting research at a PhD level at Cornell University on the chances of survival for the Jews in Belgium and the Netherlands, ends up with a similar difference, in terms of percentage, between the Jews deported from Antwerp and Brussels (based on a combination of the Jewish registry and the VJB data files)⁴⁰. In fact, in my research I analysed a surfeit of data. A representative sample, wherein all necessary elements were treated with equal importance (gender, nationality, age, profession etc.,) would have sufficed. In this sense, Meinen’s chapter on the twenty-first convoy which departed with Jews from Mechelen is not representative of a general image of “the deportee”. In order to provide this image, one would have to take a representative sample from every convoy. As a matter of fact, a random sample of all deported Jews in general would suffice⁴¹. An analysis of all deportees – combining all of the deportations – is not scientifically necessary, contrary to what Meinen claims in her general conclusion (p. 241). Moreover, because she solely focuses on deported Jews, the survivors disappear from her view. How did they survive?

The issue of where each of the deported Jews were arrested will remain a problematic question. For example, were Jews officially

37. LIEVEN SAERENS, *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad...*, p. 748-749. 38. Original quotation p. 206-207 : “Het belangrijkste probleem ligt in het feit dat Saerens zich voor zijn becijfering baseert op slechts [sic, LS] 60 procent van de uit België gedeporteerde Joden en dat in het door hem gebruikte register van de VJB, dat bovendien slechts fragmentarisch overgeleverd is, de Brusselse Joden sterk ondervetegenwoordigd zijn”. 39. Original quotation : “Saerens’ berekening houdt rekening met 85% van de in Antwerpen en 53% van de in Brussel geregistreerde Joden”. 40. E-mail 27 June 2012 Robert Braun to Lieven Saerens; ROBERT BRAUN, “The Differential Deportation Rates of Jews in Occupied Belgium : Towards a Micro-Level Dataset of Genocide Victimization”, in *Perspectives on Europe, Autumn 2011*, 41 (2), p. 121-124. 41. ROBERT B. MCCALL, *Fundamental statistics for behavioral sciences*, Belmont, CA, 2001.

registered in Antwerp arrested there, or were they arrested in Brussels, or perhaps elsewhere? All the more remarkable then is the fact that Meinen, who is well aware of this problem and does not hesitate to use the argument against my research (on p. 187 and 207), in other instances does emphasize the question of official domicile addresses (for example on p. 222). Initially, larger number of Jews hid in their homes or in the immediate neighbourhood (p. 235).

The *Devisenschutzkommando* and security on the Belgian-Dutch and Belgian-French borders

Let us return to the chapter “How were the Jews in Belgium arrested?” (*Hoe werden de Joden in België gearresteerd?*), in which Meinen examines in detail the *Devisenschutzkommando* (DSK), a hybrid organization, like many other Nazi agencies. Although not a part of the SS, the DSK cooperated with the Gestapo and the *Devisenfahndungsamt*, created by Reinhard Heydrich, head of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*. Despite the fact that several DSK-employees held an SS-rank, the DSK in Belgium fell under the authority of the *Militärverwaltung*, as did the *Grenzwachregiment Clüver*. DSK-officials had policing powers within the occupied territories, and were armed.

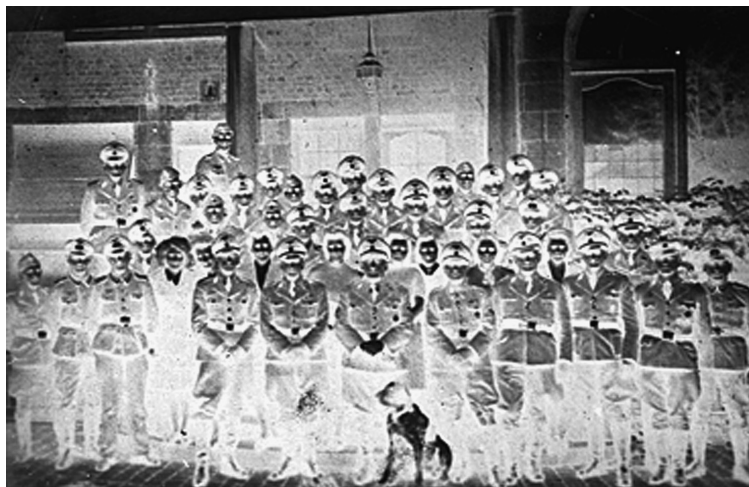
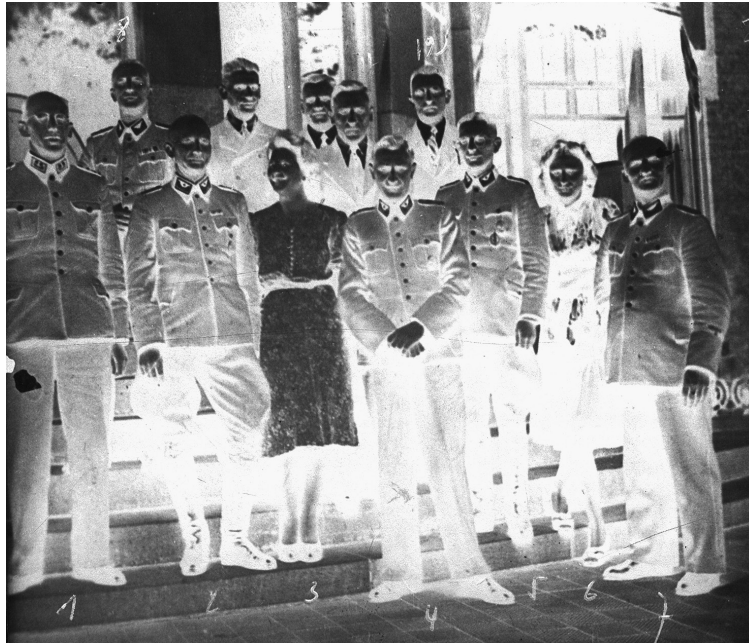
The official assignment of the DSK was to track money, precious metals, foreign currencies etc. as well as valuable materials in private possession. In practice, these actions were of course primarily aimed against Jews. “Even before the deportations began”, writes Meinen, “anti-Semitic ideology had gained a dominant influence within the DSK”⁴². This

anti-Semitic ideology also led the DSK to help the Sipo-SD in deporting the Jews. Moreover, the transfer of Jews to the Sipo-SD did not depend on the question of whether the DSK had found any currencies or valuables with the Jews they had investigated. For the custom officials, says Meinen, “the persecution of the Jews was more of a purpose in and of itself”⁴³.

Meinen was the first to discover that the DSK was systematically cooperating with the deportations from July 1942 onwards, through the arrests of Jews and certain families. As in Germany, the DSK often made use of ‘informants’ (*V-Leute*) – one could say collaborationists – who received 5 to 10% of the valuables taken into possession by the DSK. These *V-Leute* were the most important sources of information, but according to Meinen “it is also sure” (“*zeker is ook*”) that this information “in some cases” (“*in sommige gevallen*”) came from other non-Jewish Belgians who betrayed Jews (p. 137). The Sipo-SD, treated in detail in Meinen’s chapter “Manhunt”, also depended for a large part upon *V-Leute*, who received 100 to 200 Belgian francs, or more, for each person they betrayed.

After this examination, Meinen tackles the subject of the *Grenzwachregiment Clüver*. They too cooperated with several other German occupying organizations. In this way, the motorized border security of the *Feldgendarmarie* and several mobile units of the *Wehrmacht* were deployed. Casually, Meinen also remarks that for Belgian-French border security, Belgian and French customs agents were deployed in addition

42. Original quotation, p. 149 : “Nog voor de deportaties begonnen, kreeg binnen het DSK de antisemitische ideologie de bovenhand”. 43. Original quotation, p. 125 : “was de Jodenvervolgving veeleer een doel op zich”.



Above : Group Photo Devisenschuttkommando Antwerp, s.d. (Felixarchief Antwerp)

Below : Group Photo Sipo-SD Liège, s.d. (CEGES-SOMA photo nr. 12715)

to the German ones. Meinen ignores their precise role in the arrests of Jews. She also ignores the issue of the non-Jewish 'ordinary Belgians' who betrayed Jews. She fails to mention that the notorious Antwerp anti-Semite and collaborator with the Sipo-SD, Felix Lauterborn, claimed during his postwar trial that about 80% of the arrests in Antwerp happened on the basis of individual betrayals⁴⁴. Obviously, one should be critical of a statement like this, but it seems to support the increasing confirmation in international literature that individual betrayals and 'denunciations' were essential for the Nazi regime, and in fact for totalitarian regimes in general⁴⁵. Not only the Gestapo was watching: the neighbours were, as well.

Collaborationist movements, *V-Leute* and the 'average' Belgian populace

The fact that Meinen ignores Lauterborn's postwar assessment is indicative of her treatment of the issue of Belgian collaborationism as a whole. Already on page 25, she states that radical anti-Semitism, informed by Nazi doctrine, played only a minor role in the political culture of collaborationist parties such as the Flemish National Union (*Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* or VNV) and Rex (the

party lead by Léon Degrelle). Without any form of historical criticism, Meinen refers to a Sipo-SD-report of 31 August 1942: "Today one can observe no rise in the interest for the Jewish question in the daily newspapers, and the same goes for the reformist movements [VNV and Rex, LS]⁴⁶. Clearly, Meinen did not read the newspaper sources of that era, while ignoring the chapters in one of my books that treat those newspapers – chapters which in other instances she does not fail to quote frequently in order to support her criticism. She completely ignores the fact that the Sipo-SD report is a highly one-sided and biased SS source. As I already wrote in *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad*, hardcore Flemish Nazis – those who would, during the occupation, form the first cells of the *Algemene SS-Vlaanderen* – were, even before the war, using all means available to discredit the VNV in the eyes of the German SS-authorities. They continued to do so during the occupation. The Sipo-SD report is clearly to be read in this context⁴⁷. It is all the more peculiar to read somewhat further on that Meinen herself writes that the *SS-Vlaanderen* "which was a direct competitor of the VNV who was supported by the military authorities, was the main instrument of Himmler's *Volkstumpolitik* and his claims to power"⁴⁸.

44. LIEVEN SAERENS, *De Jodenjagers...*, p. 188. 45. For example: ERIC A. JOHNSON, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews and Ordinary Germans*, New York, 1999, 2000; ROBERT GELLATELY, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*, New York, 2001; FRANÇOIS-XAVIER RENARD, *Cinq pour cent de vérité. La dénonciation dans l'URSS de Staline (1928-1941)*, Paris, 2004; LAURENT JOLY (ed.), *La délation dans la France des années noires*, Paris, 2012. 46. Original quotation: "Vandaag kan men in de dagbladpers geen stijging van de belangstelling voor de Joodse kwestie vaststellen, net zomin als bij de politieke vernieuwingsbewegingen [= VNV en Rex, LS]". 47. This can also be said of the report of Sipo-SD-leader Ernst Ehlers of 31 January 1942, *Das Judentum in Belgien*: "Bemerkenswert ist hierbei, dass (...) der 'Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond' (VNV) bisher keinerlei Verständnis für die Juden – und damit Rassenfrage ziegte" [CEGES-SOMA, *Deelarchief Auditoraat-Generaal*, no. AA 1916]. 48. Original quotation, p. 26: "deze organisatie, die eveneens een concurrent was van het door het militaire bestuur gefavoriseerde en gesteunde VNV, het instrument was van Himmlers Volkstumpolitik en zijn aanspraak op de macht",

The political message of the VNV-political courses on 'the Racial and Jewish question' do not differ in any way from those of the *Algemene SS-Vlaanderen* and the SS-oriented collaborationist *Duits Vlaamse Arbeidsgemeenschap/Deutsch-Vlämische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (DeVlag). There are also VNV-circular letters ordering the betrayal of Jews⁴⁹. Indeed, actions to encourage the betrayal of Jews were certainly not only the work of the anti-Jewish organization *Volksverwering/La Défense du Peuple*, contrary to what Meinen writes (p. 219).

During the occupation, the VNV-newspaper *Volk en Staat* would regularly call upon the Germans to issue more radical anti-Jewish measures. As far as Rex is concerned, Meinen seems to be unaware of the Master's thesis of Jasmine Verbeke, nor does she include the standard reference work on Rex written by British historian Martin Conway⁵⁰. Meinen discerns only two collaborationist organizations that played an important role in the Jewish persecutions: the *Algemene SS-Vlaanderen* and *Volksverwering*, and she sounds certain of herself when she writes: "their membership were never part of Belgian public institutions"⁵¹. Perhaps, but in-depth research on this subject has yet to be undertaken. It is also easy to find several examples which prove the exact opposite. There are other mistakes: it is, for example, in-

correct to state that the *Algemene SS-Vlaanderen* did not possess any police powers (p. 221). Rex received these powers only later, in early 1943, which could partially help to explain Rex's delayed involvement in the hunt for Jews⁵².

On the subject of the role of Belgian *V-Leute*, Meinen gives the somewhat odd statement that "the perverse nature of the situation" (*"het perfide van de zaak"*) was that "when the informants of the DSK consciously lured Jews in a trap, they were not following an explicit order, but nevertheless acted with the approval of the occupier"⁵³. Hundreds of pages further along, she dismisses their work: "from a German point of view, they were merely assisting"⁵⁴. And to conclude: "In sum, one could say that collaborationists played a significant role in the arrest of Jews in Belgium. Without their cooperation, the German police apparatus would certainly not have been able to arrest as many Jews as they did. Nevertheless one may not forget that they, apart from the translators [of the Sipo-SD, LS], who were assigned as assistant agents of the BdS, were helpers in the true sense of the word. (...) In most cases however the Belgian helpers performed their actions only together with members of the German police, and that is why we cannot deny that true responsibility lay with the Germans"⁵⁵. The responsibility of the Germans: this is the dogmatic mantra

49. LIEVEN SAERENS, *Vreemdelingen...*, p. 524. 50. "Le Pays Réel à l'égard de l'antisémitisme. 'Faut-il chasser les Juifs?'" . *De pers van Rex ten aanzien van de Joden (1936-1944)*, Master Thesis., U Gent, Vakgroep Geschiedenis, Gent, 2003; MARTIN CONWAY, *Collaboration in Belgium: Léon Degrelle and the Rexist Movement, 1940-1944*, New Haven (CT), London, 1993. 51. Original quotation, p. 26: "hun aanhangers waren dan wel nooit werkzaam bij Belgische instellingen". 52. LIEVEN SAERENS, *De Jodenjagers...*, p. 199. 53. Original quotation, p. 137-138: "als de informanten van het DSK Joden doelbewust in de val lokten, zij weliswaar niet in uitdrukkelijke opdracht, maar toch met goedkeuring van de bezetter handelden". 54. Original quotation p. 211: "uit Duits perspectief assisteerden [ze] alleen maar". 55. Original quotation, p. 221: "Samengevat kan men stellen dat collaborateurs bij de arrestatie van Joden in België een aanzienlijke rol speelden. Zonder hun medewerking had het Duitse politieapparaat zeker minder Joden kunnen arresteren. Toch mag men niet vergeten dat zij, afgezien van vertalers,

which recurs throughout Meinen's entire body of research. At the same time, through an ambiguous game of words, the responsibility of those Belgians who actively supported the hunt for Jews is swept under the rug.

Meinen returns to this point in her general conclusion, referring to the conclusions of *Docile Belgium*. She states with her characteristic and provocative audacity: "Those who are unaware of the importance of the actions of the Belgian institutions treated in *Docile Belgium*, in the chapter "The hunt for the Jews", would fail to see that the essential difference between transferring home addresses and the actual arrests of Jewish families"⁵⁶.

As well, when it comes to the attitude of the 'average' Belgian populace, Meinen simply agrees with the assessment of the SiposD and the *Militärverwaltung* without any reservations. On page 27, she writes "that anti-Semitism in Belgium was supported only by a small minority", only to state on page 34 that

the general populace was "not interested" in the persecution of the Jews. Ample scholarly research has by now proved that in Belgium as in Nazi Germany itself, it was not the group of the most radical anti-Semites that increased throughout the years, but rather the group of people who were "not interested" in what was happening to the Jews⁵⁷. We also want to point to the fact that in the *Tätigkeitsbericht* of the *Militärverwaltung* of 15 September 1942 – that is, in the middle of the deportation period – it is plainly observed that: "The action [the deportations] were not met with too much concern by Belgian public opinion, because the Jews played only a marginal role, and nine out of ten were immigrants and foreigners"⁵⁸. In her conclusion, Meinen talks in very vague terms about "the solidarity of a large portion of the Belgian populace"⁵⁹, a vision already propagated much earlier by another German author, journalist Marion Schreiber who, like Meinen, also resided in Belgium for a long time and whose book on the Jewish persecution was written as an attempt to defend "the honour of the Belgians"⁶⁰.

die als hulpagenten van de BdS waren aangesteld, in de ware zin van het woord handlangers waren. (...) Doorgaans traden de Belgische handlangers echter uitsluitend op samen met leden van de Duitse politie, en daarom valt niet te ontkennen dat de eigenlijke verantwoordelijkheid bij de Duitsers lag". 56. Original quotation, p. 242: "Wie niet weet wat de relevantie is van de handelingen van de Belgische instanties die in Gewillig België onder de titel 'De jacht op de Joden' worden samengevat, zou over het hoofd zien dat er een wezenlijk verschil bestaat tussen het doorgeven van domicilieadressen en de eigenlijke arrestatie van Joodse families". 57. MICHAËL MÜLLER-CLAUDIUS, *Der Antisemitismus und das deutsche Verhängnis*, Frankfurt am Main, 1948. Ian Kershaw would later adopt the concept of "indifference" ("moral indifference" etc.) (IAN KERSHAW, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, New Haven, 2009). 58. Original quotation: "In der belgischen Öffentlichkeit erregte die Aktion kein allzu grosses Aufsehen, da die Juden hier nur eine geringe Rolle spielten und zu 9/10 Emigranten und sonstige Ausländer waren". SERGE KLARFELD & MAXIME STEINBERG, *Die Endlösung der Judenfrage in Belgien. Dokumente*, New York/Paris, [1980], p. 45. 59. Original quotation p. 245: "de solidariteit van een groot deel van de Belgische bevolking". See also: LIEVEN SAERENS, "Die Hilfe für Juden in Belgien", in WOLFGANG BENZ & JULIABNE WETZEL (eds.), *Solidarität und Hilfe für Juden während der NS-Zeit*, vol. 4, Berlin, 2004, p. 193-280. 60. MARION SCHREIBER, *Stille Rebellen. Der Überfall auf den 20. Deportationszug nach Auschwitz*, Berlin, 2000; ID., *Stille rebellen. De overval op deportatietrein nr. 20 naar Auschwitz*, Amsterdam/Antwerpen, 2001; ID., *Rebelles silencieux. L'attaque du 20^e convoi pour Auschwitz*, Bruxelles, 2002; ID., *Silent Rebels: The True Story of the Raid on the Twentieth Train to Auschwitz*, 2003, 2004-2005.

In a much-debated interview in the popular Flemish news weekly *Knack*, Meinen repeated these statements. The interview made the front pages in *Knack* with headlines such as “The Jews received a lot of support from the population” and “the VNV and Flemish SS were not interested in the Jews”⁶¹. When this caused disapproving comments from certain Jewish voices, Meinen was quoted in a Jewish magazine as being “shocked”: “I have never said that. My words were taken out of context to create the wrong impression”⁶². After this, Meinen was invited by the Forum of Jewish Organizations (the Flemish umbrella organization for Jewish organizations) on 31 May 2011 for a debate. It became a very heated debate, during which Meinen somewhat softened her views. However, in contrast to this perceived retreat from her controversial positions, a recent interview of Meinen again bears a comparable subtitle: “According to historian Insa Meinen, the SS and Wehrmacht organized the essential part of the Final Solution in our country. The Belgian collaborationists were simply helpers”⁶³.

Individual Jewish strategies of defense, and existential fears

In light of Meinen’s justified conclusion that “the bulk” of the Jews in Belgium were arrested individually or in smaller groups,

she also addresses the individual defence strategies of Jews. Detailed research has already been conducted on the workings and tactics of the organized Jewish resistance – the Jewish Defense Committee (*Joods Verdedigingscomité/Comité de la Défense des Juifs*) – most notably in the writings of Steinberg. This is not the case, however, for research covering the “exact circumstances and direct causes which instigated Jews to flee”⁶⁴ or to hide, nor for research investigating the means which Jews used to escape. To this we can add that there is a lack of research about Belgian non-Jews who individually, and in a non-organized context, offered aid to Jews.

Meinen lists the strategies of flight, but she can hardly inform us about the “exact circumstances and direct causes which instigated Jews to flee” (see p. 135). The archives of the DSK prove however that “many” Jews fled fearing for their lives. Therefore, we are dealing here with an ‘existential fear’. We can also find traces of this in other archives, such as the archives of the Belgian archbishop Van Roey⁶⁵. In this, regard it is interesting that in Meinen’s chapter “The 21st Convoy to Auschwitz” (*Het 21^{ste} Konvooi naar Auschwitz*), Otto Siegburg of the *Judenreferat* of the Sipo-SD Brussels is mentioned. Meinen discovered’ that while

61. PIET DE MOOR, “België in tijden van Holocaust”, in *Knack*, 25.5.2011, cover and p. 32.

62. Original quotation: “Dat heb ik nooit gezegd, mijn woorden werden geïsoleerd om een verkeerde indruk te wekken”. “Holocaustresearcher niet te spreken over jongste cover van Knack”, in *Joods Actueel*, 27.5.2011. 63. Original quotation: “Selon l'historienne Insa Meinen, SS et Wehrmacht ont mis en oeuvre l'essentiel de la 'Solution finale' chez nous. Les collabos belges furent d'abord des auxiliaires”. (Interview with Insa Meinen by Pascal Martin in *Le Soir*, 17.10.2012, in which she repeats: “Les arrestations individuelles ou des petits groupes par la Gestapo étaient en réalité souvent le fait de petits commandos, constitués d'un Allemand et d'un collaborateur. L'Allemand était donc bien le responsable”). In the interview in *Le Vif* (4.10.2012, p. 37), Meinen has a more nuanced opinion. 64. Original quotation: “de precieze omstandigheden en aanleidingen die Joden ertoe aanzetten te vluchten”. 65. HANNE HELLEMANS, *Schimmen met een ster...*, p. 69.

posted to Poland in 1939, this man participated to the actions of an “*Einsatzkommando*”. Indeed, I already mentioned earlier in my book that *Judenreferent* Kurt Asche was part of an “*Einsatzkommando*” in 1939-1941⁶⁶. This is interesting, because it means that at least four of the prominent members of the Sipo-SD in Belgium had direct experience with killing Jews in Eastern Europe (the other two were Ernst Ehlers, the head of the Sipo-SD in Belgium and the north of France⁶⁷ and Edward Strauch⁶⁸, who led the Sipo-SD of Liège and Arlon from 31 May 1944 onwards). This would imply that at least these members of the Sipo-SD were well aware of the fact that when the Belgian Jewish community Belgium was being deported to ‘the East’, a tragic end awaited them. However, the question of ‘knowledge’ of the *Endlösung* – both amongst Jews as well as non-Jews – still remains a delicate topic in international literature on the Judeocide⁶⁹.

Conclusion

Insa Meinen wrote an important book, based on innovative archival research in Belgian, German and French archives. This led her to the conclusion that the *Militärverwaltung* played an essential role in the deportation of the Jews. Meinen also rightly stresses that most Jews were not arrested during the larger round-ups, but during individual and smaller-scale actions. Furthermore, she succeeds in describing the specific climate and the powerful oppositional role of the Brussels authorities more clearly

than previous historical studies. Her book does not give a total overview of the Shoah in Belgium, however, contrary to what the book’s title suggests. This, though, was not Meinen’s goal : she wanted to fill in certain gaps. Meinen’s book was clearly written from the perspective of the Germans, which means the ‘daily life’ of the Jewish community in Belgium during the occupation remains largely missing from Meinen’s research.

Nobody will disagree with the statement that the Germans were the main perpetrators in what happened. The three concepts of ‘perpetrators’, ‘bystanders’ and ‘victims’ developed by Raul Hilberg in his 1992 study still provide a standard interpretative framework⁷⁰. However, these concepts have been fine-tuned since then. The Dutch researchers Marnix Croes, a historian and political scientist, and Peter Tammes, a sociologist, proposed the framework of ‘perpetrators’ (the Germans), ‘helpers’ (members of collaborationist organizations), ‘accomplices’ (for the Belgian case : mainly the Belgian administrators and police services who followed German orders to cooperate in the persecution of the Jews), ‘bystanders’ (generally speaking the non-Jewish social environment), ‘opponents’ (non-Jewish people who helped Jews) and ‘victims’ (the Jews)⁷¹.

To conduct research from the perspective of the ‘accomplices’, ‘the bystanders’ or the ‘helpers’ would be as equally legitimate as

66. Dossier Kurt Asche (CEGES-SOMA, *Personalakten van Duitse, in België bedrijvige en Belgische NSDAP- en SS-leden*, AA 535). 67. LIEVEN SAERENS, *De Jodenjagers...*, p. 33. 68. NICO WOUTERS, “De Jodenvervolgving voor de Belgische rechters”, in RUDI VAN DOORSLAER (ed.) and others, *Gewillig België...*, p. 931. 69. See recently : BART VAN DER BOOM, *We weten niets van hun lot. Gewone Nederlanders en de Holocaust*, Amsterdam, 2012. 70. RAUL HILBERG, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders : The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*, New York, 1992. 71. MARNIX CROES & PETER TAMMES, ‘Gif laten wij niet voortbestaan’. Een onderzoek naar de overlevingskansen van joden in de Nederlandse gemeenten, 1940-1945, Amsterdam, 2004, p. 23-26.

Meinen's emphasis on the role of the German perpetrators. Not according to Meinen, however, who feels that this type of research minimizes German responsibility. She goes so far as to state that "until now there has been hardly any attention paid" (p. 12) to the role of the different German organizations and structures in the persecution of the Jews in Belgium. Admittedly, Meinen did conduct research on several German administrations in which there had been little interest until now – most notably the DSK and the custom services – and for this she deserves credit. But as a whole, this aforementioned statement is without any foundation. Since Maxime Steinberg's *L'étoile et le fusil*, every major scholarly study on the Jewish persecution

published in Belgium – even those whose main focus were the 'accomplices' and/or the 'bystanders' – have given ample attention to the German factor. In Meinen's introduction, she remarks upon *Docile Belgium*: "This report, detailed yet ridden with errors..."⁷². By systematically using these kinds of provocative, unnuanced statements, she unnecessarily devaluates her own research, which in fact is perfectly complementary to the research that came before. At certain moments, her 'German lens' leads to a trivialization of any Belgian involvement in the persecution of the Jews⁷³. She gives the impression she uses a consciously conflictual tone in order to strategically distinguish herself and her book from the rest of Belgian historiography.

Abbreviations

BdS	<i>Beauftrager des Chefs der Sipo-SD</i>
CEGES-SOMA	<i>Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society</i>
DeVlag	<i>Duits Vlaamse Arbeidsgemeenschap / Deutsch-Vlämische Arbeitsgemeinschaft</i>
DSK	<i>Devisenschutzkommando</i>
OFK	<i>Oberfeldkommandantur</i>
Sipo-SD	<i>Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst</i>
VJB	<i>Vereniging van Joden in België</i> (Association of Jews in Belgium)
VNV	<i>Vlaams Nationaal Verbond</i> (Flemish National Union)

72. Original quotation, p. 11 : "dit gedetailleerde, maar met tal van vergissingen belaste onderzoeksrapport" (p. 11). 73. Sometimes, it is equally unclear for the reader what is innovative or new in Meinen's argument when she tackles the difference between Brussels and Antwerp. See also : FABIAN VAN SAMANG, "La persécution des Juifs en Belgique. Un nouveau paradigme?", in *Traces de Mémoire. Pédagogie et Transmission*, 12.2011, no. 2, p. 5-8.