

THE ANNEXATION OF EUPEN-MALMEDY

Becoming Belgian, 1919–1929

Vincent O'Connell



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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-1-137-59089-3 ISBN 978-1-349-95295-3 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95295-3>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017950723

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Printed on acid-free paper

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The registered company is Nature America Inc.
The registered company address is: 1 New York Plaza, New York, NY 10004, U.S.A.

for
Ellie & Bess

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout my time spent researching and writing this work, I was truly fortunate to have encountered such generous people who provided me with information, advice, direction, support and encouragement. I equally benefited from the assistance of a number of archival and scholarly institutions in Belgium, Germany, the UK, and Ireland. The assistance and encouragement that I received from my colleagues at the University of Limerick is very much appreciated. I must first express my sincerest gratitude to Prof. Anthony McElligott at the University of Limerick for his unwavering encouragement and confidence in my work throughout the course of my doctoral research and beyond. I thank him for his honest and forthright critique and for his guidance. I especially wish to thank Prof. Martin Conway at Balliol College, Oxford, for inspiring me through his incredible talent as a historian. His contribution to our understanding of the complexities of Belgium's recent history is unmatched. I am grateful to Prof. Barry Doyle and also to Dr. Nico Wouters for their comments and critiques during various stages of my study. My thanks also to Dr. Christoph Brüll, whose work on Eupen-Malmedy is as engaging as his nature is generous.

I am extremely grateful for the time afforded to me by staff at the *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères de Belgique* (AAEB) in Brussels. Documents relating to Eupen-Malmedy held at the AAEB offer a fascinating insight into the Belgian government's thinking, from its initial annexation of the territory, through to the attempted retrocession in 1926.

In addition, the Belgian parliamentary papers, together with cabinet minutes, which I consulted at the *Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique* (KBR) provide a useful insight into the differing perspectives on Eupen-Malmedy in Belgian political circles. The cabinet minutes demonstrate that what was digested at the cabinet table did not always equate with what the people were fed, and in particular during the deliberations over the potential retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy. Both the parliamentary papers and the cabinet minutes are fully accessible online.¹ At the *Archives Générales du Royaume* (AGR), Filip Strubbe and Pierre Alain Tellier were especially diligent in dealing with my queries. The AGR library houses the entire collection of the *Journal Officiel-Amtsblatt Malmedy-Eupen*, in which all legislation and decrees enacted in Eupen-Malmedy from 1921–1925 were published. Documents pertaining to Baltia’s military record and that of his father, consulted at the *Musée Royal de l’Armée et d’Histoire Militaire* (KLM-MRA) in Brussels, were helpful in gaining an insight into the evolution of Baltia’s character from his days as an army officer in the Great War through to his period as Royal High Commissioner of Eupen-Malmedy. Extremely important are Baltia’s official reports and his memoirs, which are located at both the *Landesarchiv Nordrhein Westfalen*, Düsseldorf, and at the *Staatsarchiv Eupen*.² At both locations, one may consult his three official reports compiled between January 1920 and July 1922, in which the machinations of his Eupen-Malmedy government are detailed under various headings from finance to military, and policing to agriculture and education. The *Staatsarchiv Eupen* also holds additional documentation relating to the government of Eupen-Malmedy along with material in the Nachlass Baltia pertaining to the Baltia family and Baltia’s private memoirs (as distinct from the memoirs relating to his tenure as Royal High Commissioner of Eupen-Malmedy).³

¹<http://primary-sources.eui.eu/website/belgië-notulen-van-de-ministerraad-1916-1979>; <https://www.lachambre.be/kvvcr/index.cfm>; http://www.senat.be/www/?MIval=/index_senate&LANG=fr.

²This is a typed version of the original (now lost), which was made during the Second World War. Landesarchiv Nordrhein Westfalen: Sammlung Baltia, Abteilung Rheinland, Standort Düsseldorf: RW 0010 (1920–1922).

³SAE X85, which comprises the following: Dekreten und Verordnungen; Archives de guerre; Archiv des Pressedienstes; Verwaltungsakten; Nachlass Baltia.

In Malmedy, I visited the archive at the Royal *Club Wallon* (RCW) where I consulted local newspapers of the period, including *Die Arbeit*, *La Semaine*, *Der Landbote* and *La Warche*. A special word of thanks is due to Raymond Blaise, curator at the RCW, for his professionalism and patience during my consultations there. Without the kindness shown to me by a truly remarkable local historian, Raymond Jacob, President of Malmedy-Folklore, I may never have begun this project. I thank Raymond for his kindness, and for the direction which he gave me during the nascent stage of my research. In Eupen, Dr. Alfred Minke (now retired) and Dr. Els Herrebout at the *Staatsarchiv Eupen* were gracious in giving of their time and expertise from the earliest stages of this study. I am also indebted to their colleague, Monique Beuken, for her expert assistance. My research in Germany was equally well facilitated at the *Landesarchiv Nordrhein Westfalen*, and by the guidance I received from Frau KÜchler and Alois Fischer at the *Bundesarchiv Koblenz*, not forgetting Franz Göttlicher at the *Bundesarchiv* in Berlin. Among the papers consulted at The National Archives in Kew are Belgian, German, and British government and diplomatic reports detailing the socio-political situation in Eupen-Malmedy at various stages throughout the interwar period.

This study would not have been possible were it not for the very generous support which I have received from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Limerick, which part-funded this project. I also received funding from the *German History Society* in London towards my study at the *Universität Heinrich Heine* in Düsseldorf. This was a particularly wonderful experience and I am grateful to Dr. Annika Mombauer and to Dr. Stefan Berger for facilitating my time there. While in Düsseldorf, I was made to feel very much at home by Anne and Sofia Minarik—thank you both for putting up with me. In Malmedy, the Sante and Legros families were wonderful hosts during my visits to the town and its hinterland.

I greatly appreciate the support of so many of my colleagues at the University of Limerick, but particularly the library staff, whose expertise, patience and good humour have been invaluable. I especially wish to thank Pattie, Helen, Sinéad, Ken, Evelyn, Monica, Ciara, Anne, and Carmel for going above and beyond the call of duty at times. Special thanks also to Irene for your intelligent insight and pertinent observations. My thanks also to Julie for your time and assistance.

My greatest inspiration has been the love, understanding and friendship of my two beautiful daughters, Ellie and Bess; I owe you both so much. Thank you to Maggie also for your friendship and support over such an unusual journey. Finally, I wish to thank my mother, Kathleen, for her prayers and encouragement over the years.

May 2017

Vincent O'Connell

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Auswärtiges Amt
AAEB	Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères de Belgique
ADV	Alledeutscher Verband
AGR	<i>Archives Générales du Royaume</i>
AO	<i>Army of Occupation (Armée d'Occupation)</i>
APB	Annales Parlementaires Belges
APR	<i>Archives du Palais Royal</i>
BAB	<i>Bundesarchiv Berlin</i>
BAK	<i>Bundesarchiv Koblenz</i>
Bd.	Band
CVP	<i>Christliche Volkspartei</i>
DNVP	<i>Deutschnationale Volkspartei</i>
DKG	<i>Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft</i>
Ét.Maj.	<i>État Major</i>
FO	Foreign Office
GQG	<i>Grand Quartier Général</i>
HC	High Commissioner (Haut Commissaire)
HF	Heimattreue Front
IARHC	Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission
JOME	<i>Journal Officiel—Amtsblatt—Malmedy-Eupen</i>
KBR	<i>Bibliothèque Royale du Royaume de la Belgique (Brussels)</i>
KLM/MRA	<i>Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire</i>
LANRW	<i>Landesarchiv Nordrhein Westfalen</i>
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i>
POB	<i>Parti Ouvrier Belge</i>
RCW	Royal Club Wallon

SAE	<i>Staatsarchiv Eupen</i>
SS	<i>Schutzstaffel</i>
TNA	The National Archives (Kew)
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
ZBV	<i>Zur besonderen Verwendung</i>
Zgs	<i>Zeitgeschichte</i>

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Introduction

Straddling the frontier between Belgium and Germany, with Luxembourg to the south and the Netherlands to the north, the territory encompassing Belgium's Eastern Cantons of Eupen, Malmédy and St Vith rested for centuries on the cusp of conflict and compromise.¹ The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 set in train a series of events that would see these *Kreise*, which since 1815 occupied the most westerly corner of the German Reich, once more become the focus of renewed claims and counter-claims by rival protagonists. In January 1919, representatives from the victorious nations set about to once more reconfigure the map of Europe at the Peace Conference in Paris.² It is only as a consequence of the Treaty of Versailles that the term 'Eupen-Malmédy' came into being, for the sake of political expediency.³ This convenient creation owed much to the diplomatic dexterity of Belgium's foreign minister and senior plenipotentiary to the Paris Peace Conference, Paul Hymans.⁴ As part of the post-war

¹In 1985, the communal council of Malmédy voted to dispense with the accent from the spelling of its name. *Le Soir*, 7 February 2000.

²*Kreis* refers to an administrative district; the plural is *Kreise*. At that time, Saint Vith was an integral part of the *Kreis* of Malmédy.

³The Treaty of Versailles, iii. 34.

⁴However, the laconic term itself is credited to a member of the American delegation. Sally Marks, *Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 137–147; David H. Miller, *My Diary at the*



Fig. 1.1 Belgium in 1919. Credit: Alina O'Shaughnessy (www.alinaoshaughnessy.com) and Vincent O'Connell

process of territorial amputation, Germany was forced to cede Eupen-Malmedy conditionally to Belgium, pending the outcome of a popular consultation in the territory within six months of the Versailles Treaty becoming effective (Fig. 1.1).

The *Kreis* of Malmedy encompassed an area of 813 square kilometres with 36,916 inhabitants. While the vast majority of Malmedy's population identified as German, this number included around 10,000 Walloons who, for over a hundred years, had been subjects of the *Kaiserreich*.⁵ More than half of these were concentrated in the town of Malmedy, with the remainder residing in the surrounding hinterland of 'Prussian Wallonia'.⁶ The *Kreis* contained fourteen town councils or *Gemeinderat*, four of which were solidly Walloon, three mixed and eight German; one of these was St Vith. The town of Malmedy itself had just 6,000 inhabitants, and was largely dependent on its famed paper milling

Conference of Paris (with documents), (New York: Appeal Printing Company, 1924), 435–437; Jane Kathryn Miller, *Belgian Foreign Policy Between Two Wars* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), 72–78.

⁵Staatsarchiv Eupen (SAE), Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III.191, *Haut Commissariat Royal d'Eupen Malmedy*, Rapport sur l'activité générale du Gouvernement d'Eupen et de Malmedy, September 1919–July 1920 (Hereafter, *Rapport sur l'activité*, i), 148.

⁶Prussian Wallonia comprised the towns of Malmedy and Waimes.

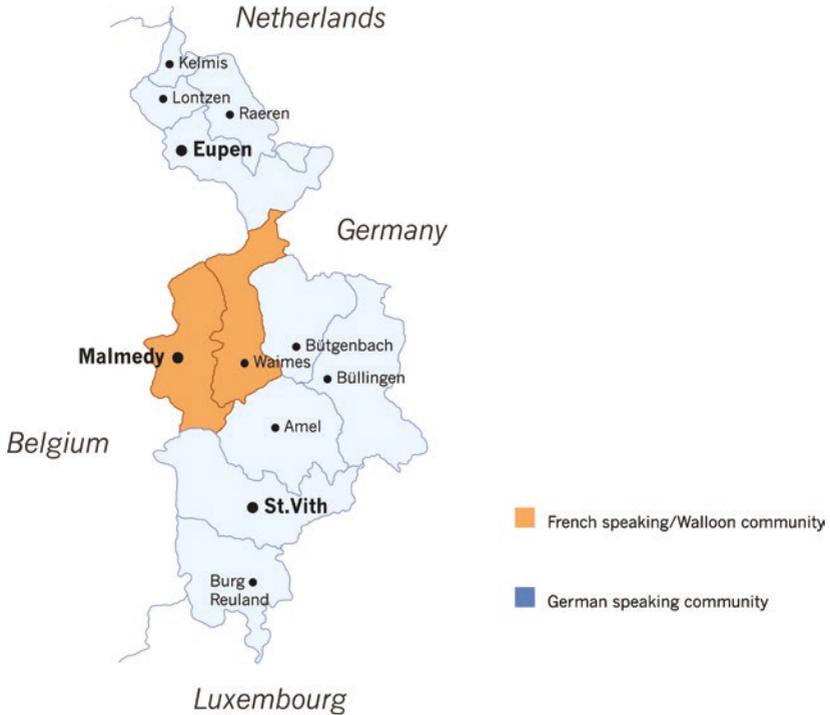


Fig. 1.2 The Eastern Cantons. Credit: Alina O’Shaughnessy (www.alinaoshaughnessy.com) and Vincent O’Connell

and tanning industries.⁷ Eupen was geographically a much smaller *Kreis* than Malmédy, at just 176 square kilometres, albeit more densely populated. From the fourteenth century, Flemish weavers from Bruges and Ghent had established themselves in Eupen, beginning a tradition of textile production era (Fig. 1.2). By the turn of the twentieth century, the majority of Eupen’s 27,360 inhabitants were in the main employed in textiles, weaving, or agriculture.⁸ By the end of the war, the town of Eupen had a population of around 15,000. As was the case with Eupen,

⁷ *Rapport sur l’activité*, i, 148.

⁸ Klaus Pabst, Eupen Malmédy in der belgischen Regierungs- und Parteienpolitik 1914–1940, *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, 76 (1964), 206–515 (219).

the surrounding towns of Hergenrath, Eynatten, Kettenis, Lontzen, Neutral Moresnet, Walhorn, and Raeren were overwhelmingly German-speaking.⁹ Now, in the wake of the war, the inhabitants of these two *Kreise* would have to accommodate themselves to a new reality, as these former subjects of the now-defunct *Kaiserreich* prepared to become Belgian. This significant alteration to the status of this borderland territory was just the latest in its long and complex history.

From the latter half of the sixth century, Irish Columban monks introduced Christianity to the southern Rhineland, culminating in the founding of the abbatial principality of Stavelot-Malmedy in 651 by a community of Frankish monks. Malmedy fell under the auspices of the diocese of Liège, while Stavelot was attached to the diocese of Cologne.¹⁰ As a consequence of the Treaty of Verdun in 843, the principality of Stavelot-Malmedy became absorbed into Middle Francia following the tripartite division of the Carolingian Empire.¹¹ However, the principality continued to be an independent state within the Holy Roman Empire up to 1795.¹² Like Malmedy, Eupen also formed part of Middle Francia (later Lotharingia), and from the eleventh century became part of the Duchy of Limburg.¹³ St Vith dates back to 836 as a medieval settlement. From the late twelfth century, it served as the customs post for the dukes of Limburg. As a consequence of the battle of Worringen in 1288, these territories were annexed by John I of Brabant. From the fifteenth century up to 1795, they fell under the control of the dukes of Burgundy and later the Habsburg dynasty: the

⁹Lucien Colson, *Malmédy et les territoires rétrocédés* (Liège: Joseph Olivier, 1920), 21.

¹⁰In circa 648 AD, St Remacle was granted vast concessions of land by King Sigebert III of Austrasia (the homeland of the Franks from the sixth to the eighth century). St Remacle laid the first stone for the monastery in Malmedy, which at this time was attached to the diocese of Cologne. Within a short period, he began to construct a convent in Stavelot in the diocese of Liège. The then principality of Stavelot-Malmedy was contained within the empire of Charlemagne. Sebastian Scharte, *Preussisch-deutsch-belgisch: Nationale Erfahrung und Identität, Leben an der deutsch-belgischen Gernze im 19. Jahrhundert* (New York, 2010), 31.

¹¹Scharte, *Preussisch-deutsch-belgisch*, 34.

¹²Andrea Velz, 'La vie en Wallonie prussienne entre nationalisme et Kulturkampf: étude illustrée par l'exemple de l'abbé Nicolas Pietkin' [Unpublished thesis] (Université Libre de Bruxelles [ULB], 2002), 17.

¹³Scharte, *Preussisch-deutsch-belgisch*, 34.

Spanish Habsburgs until 1700 and, after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the Austrian Habsburgs.¹⁴

The incorporation of Eupen, Malmedy and St Vith into the French Republic following the Revolution saw these cantons eventually comprise the department of l'Ourthe, with Liège as prefecture.¹⁵ As part of this new dispensation, a newly designated *arrondissement* of Malmedy was made up of eleven cantons, including those of Malmedy, Eupen and St Vith. Following the defeat of Napoleon in the summer of 1814, the Treaty of Paris defined the new borders of post-Napoleonic France. However, a number of territorial decisions remained to be resolved. The Congress of Vienna later that year oversaw a redrawing of the European map, and among the territorial transformations, Prussia was granted the greater share of Saxony as well as parts of Westphalia and the Rhine Province. The twin towns of Stavelot and Malmedy, along with the ancient abbey, would henceforth be divided between two separate states. Stavelot was claimed by the newly constituted Kingdom of the Netherlands (after 1830, it was absorbed into the newly independent Kingdom of Belgium), while Malmedy together with Eupen was ceded to Prussia. Malmedy, Eupen and St Vith would henceforth be located within the Grand Duchy of the Lower-Rhine inside a newly enlarged Prussia.¹⁶ Following their annexation, Malmedy, Eupen and St Vith

¹⁴Léo Van Hommerich, *Gouvernés et gouvernants dans le duché de Limbourg et les autres pays d'Outre-Meuse* in Émile Lousse, Walter Prevenier, Christiane Piérard, Paul Harsin, Roger Petit, Léo Van Hommerich, Henry Joosen, Josy Muller, Geneviève Moisse-Daxhelet, Gabriel Wymans, Pierre de Fraine, Jan Dhondt, John Gilissen, *Anciens Pays et Assemblées d'États*, XXXIII (Leuven: U. Nauwelaerts, 1965), 109–117.

¹⁵L'Ourte (later spelt Ourthe) was formed from parts of the county of Namur and of the duchies of Brabant, Limburg and Luxembourg (territories belonging to the Austrian Netherlands), the prince–bishopric of Liège, and the ecclesiastical principality of Stavelot-Malmedy. The French divided the department into three *arrondissements*: Liège, Huy and Malmedy. The *arrondissement* of Malmedy contained the towns of Aubel, Cronembourg, Eupen, Limbourg, St.-Vith, Schleyden, Spa, Stavelot, Verviers, Vielsalm and Malmedy. Almanach Impérial, AN BISSEXTIL M. DCCC. XII (Paris: Chez Testu, 1812), 449–450.

¹⁶Following their annexation by Prussia, the two districts were transformed into three *Kreise* with St Vith forming a separate *Kreis*, having been separated from Malmedy. K.L. Kaufmann, *Der Kreis Malmedy*: Geschichte eines Eifelkreises von 1865 bis 1920 (Bonn: Wissenschaftliches Archiv, 1961), 12–19; Pabst, 'Das problem der Deutsch-Belgischen Grenze', 183–210; Christoph Brüll, 'Eupen-Malmedy 1918–1945: le temps des déchirures', in *Hommage à Henri Bragard (1877–1944)*, Collection "Mémoire wallonne" (13) (Liège: Société de Langue et de Littérature wallonnes, 2009), 7–38.

were then divided between separate *Länder*—Jülich-Kleve-Berg and the Grand Duchy of the Lower Rhine (Großherzogtum Niederrhein).¹⁷ The two provinces were governed from Cologne and Koblenz respectively. These two provinces would eventually merge in 1822 to form a single *Rheinprovinz*. From 1816, the *Regierungsbezirk* of Aachen had responsibility for the *Kreise* of Eupen, Malmédy and St Vith, the latter *Kreis* having been reattached to Malmédy in 1821.¹⁸

The immediate consequence of the appearance of these new frontiers was the emergence of linguistic minorities, this latest dissection, taking little account of the historical and linguistic complexities of the region. The new borders cut arbitrarily through centuries of tradition and community.¹⁹ Yet in the fifty years or so following its annexation by Prussia, the Walloon inhabitants of Malmédy were, in the words of the revered abbot Nicolas Pietkin of Sourbrodt (a village on the outskirts of Malmédy), quite ‘à l’aise’ with their minority status inside Germany, and ‘worried only for themselves’, as opposed to wanting to be united with their fellow Walloons on the far side of the German border.²⁰ Pietkin never advocated ceding from Prussia, in spite of the limitations placed on his own activities under Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*.²¹ He believed that most of the Walloon population at that time preferred to be part of a ‘little Walloon *patrie* within a greater Prussian *patrie*’.²² When King

¹⁷Between 1808 and 1815, Prussia was divided into 25 *Länder*.

¹⁸Scharte, *Preussisch-deutsch-belgisch*, 35–44.

¹⁹For example, the region of Montzen in the north-eastern pocket of the province of Liège, and the region around Arlon to the south near the border with Luxembourg, where a German dialect was spoken, was initially attached to the Kingdom of the Netherlands. However, following its recognition as an independent kingdom in 1830, both Montzen and Arlon were incorporated into Belgium. Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland: Selbst und Fremdbilder bei Josef Ponten und Peter Schmitz, 1918–1940* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2013), 75–76.

²⁰Nicolas Pietkin, *La Germanisation de la Wallonie prussienne: aperçu historique* (Bruxelles: Schepens, 1904), 24. The first president of the Club Wallon was Guillaume Bodet. Elisée Legros, *La wallonnie Malmédienne sous le régime prussien, Le Pays de Saint Remacle*, xiii (1977), 273–302.

²¹Joseph Bastin, *L’abbé Nicolas Pietkin à sa mémoire et à celle des défenseurs de la tradition latine en Wallonie Malmédienne, La Terre Wallonne*, 21 (June 1921), 129–239 (152–153).

²²{U}ne petite patrie wallonne dans la grande patrie prussienne’, Nicolas Pietkin cited in Christoph Brüll, ‘Eupen-Malmédy 1918–1945: le temps des déchirures’, in *Hommage à Henri Bragard (1877–1944)*, 9–10.

Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia paid a visit to Malmédy in 1856, he blissfully proclaimed his pride ‘to have in my kingdom a little country where French is spoken’.²³ The coming to power of Bismarck in 1862 resulted in a souring of the relationship between the Walloon community and the Prussian state.²⁴ The culture struggle or *Kulturkampf* that accompanied the establishment of the unified German state in 1871 saw the level of mutual respect that had existed between the minority Walloon and majority German communities very quickly eroded, but not entirely obliterated.²⁵ Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, described by its critics as ‘Germanisation in excess’ (albeit initially a war against the power of the Catholic Church in Germany), aimed at forging a culturally homogenous German nation.²⁶ Only the use of the German language was permitted, and those who dared to speak publicly in their native tongue were prosecuted.²⁷ The organized suppression of the French and Walloon languages in the areas of both communal administration and education was accompanied by the extirpation of Walloon administrators from schools in 1879. Henceforth, it was no longer the role of primary schools to ‘conserve the maternal local language but uniquely the German language’.²⁸ Following the outbreak of the Great War, the fortunes of these borderland districts would once more fall under a cloud of uncertainty. While some would welcome the prospect of becoming Belgian, for the majority of the population, it was an assault on their identity as Germans.

²³Colson, *Malmédy et les territoires rétrocédés*, 25.

²⁴Otto von Bismarck was appointed prime minister of Prussia in 1862. He became chancellor in 1866.

²⁵The *Kulturkampf* lasted from 1873 to 1887, when German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck clashed with the Catholic Church over the latter’s claim that obedience to the Catholic Church trumped obedience to the State. The First Vatican Council’s proclamation of papal infallibility in 1870 was deemed to threaten the authority of the German state. However, the phenomenon also affected the secular realm, not least in the area of language.

²⁶Velz, *La vie en Wallonie prussienne entre nationalisme et ‘Kulturkampf’*, 4.

²⁷Although the Walloon community in Malmédy was directly affected by these new measures, the most extreme manifestation of the *Kulturkampf* in practice was experienced by Germany’s Polish minority in East Prussia. Klaus Pabst, ‘Die preussischen Wallonen—eine staatsstreue Minderheit im Westen’, in H.H. Hahn & P. Kunze (eds) *Nationale Minderheiten und Staatliche Minderheitenpolitik in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 71–79.

²⁸*La Semaine*, 30 March 1889.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, the concept of 'Germanness' underwent something of a transformation. While the Prussian citizenship law of 1842 had stipulated the revocation of citizenship following ten years of uninterrupted residence abroad, the revolutions of 1848 led to a reconsideration of the concept of what it meant to be German. The North German Confederation's citizenship law of 1870 replaced the local conception of citizenship inherent in the Prussian legislation with a more inclusive version, enabling a citizen from one German state to be considered as an equal citizen in all.²⁹ The law also allowed for the retention of German citizenship among emigrants by registration at a consulate. The arguments on what it meant to be German orbited around an ethnonational conception, or one based on the notion the *Staatsnation*. Rogers Brubaker has shown how with German national consciousness, which Brubaker tells us had as its 'institutional incubator' the Holy Roman Empire, the concept of nationhood and statehood were two separate and distinct entities.³⁰ This *Kulturnation*, as distinct from the *Staatsnation*, was fuelled by the philosophy of German Romanticism of the nineteenth century, which gave credence to the idea of a *Volksgeist* or national spirit.³¹ This concept of *Volksgeist* aspired to unite territories inhabited by the one *Volk*. The creation of the German Empire in 1871 from the mosaic that was the German Confederation was its ultimate manifestation.³²

The ever-growing numbers of *Auslandsdeutsche*, or Germans living beyond the borders of the *Vaterland*, became increasingly important to the aims of the German state by the latter years of the nineteenth century. An increased emphasis on a cultural national identity was promoted

²⁹Howard Sargent, 'Diasporic citizens', in Krista O'Donnell, Renate Bridenthal and Nancy Reagin (eds), *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 17–39.

³⁰Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Belgium* (Cambridge, Mass, & London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3–6.

³¹The terms *Kulturnation* and *Staatsnation* were originally formulated by the German historian Friedrich Meinecke in *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat: Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates* (München & Berlin: Druck & Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1908), 4–8 & passim.

³²Andrea Velz, 'La vie en Wallonie prussienne entre nationalisme et Kulturkampf: étude illustrée par l'exemple de l'abbé Nicolas Pietkin' [Unpublished thesis] (Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), 2002), 29–30.

by colonial and patriotic societies, such as the *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (Association for Germans Abroad) founded in 1908 for the protection and promotion of German culture abroad.³³

The German concept of *Heimat* is important here. Celia Applegate has assessed the meaning of *Heimat* in German history and culture, and argues that the very elusive nature of its meaning allowed it to be moulded to fit the exigencies of particular interests at various times in German history.³⁴ The term is not so easily translated into English, or any other language for that matter. While the concept of the *Vaterland* encompassed the anthropomorphic idea of the German nation, the *Heimat* evoked the essence of the local, the home, the community, its culture, its traditions and its language. The *Heimat* in this way entailed the psychological and emotional liens between an individual and their locality. In terms of the German nation, however, a perceived common culture and language saw ‘the nation claim the individual’.³⁵

It has been demonstrated elsewhere how the concepts of nationhood and citizenship differ essentially between German and French interpretations. Historically, the French model was linked to the spatial and institutional frame of the state, where the idea of nation and kingdom were conflated. Juxtaposed against the German concept of nation, in France, nation-building took place within the contours of pre-existing borders. At the centre of this process was the ‘social contract’ based on the idea of the general will, and not dependent on a pre-determined national character or *Volksgeist*.³⁶ Like France, the Belgian state allowed the individual to ‘claim the state as nation’. However, in

³³Thomas Lekan, German landscape: Local promotion of the Heimat abroad, in Krista O’Donnell, Renate Bridenthal & Nancy Reagin (eds), *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 150–155.

³⁴The fusion of sentimental arousal with more practical and social–economic considerations exposed the term to a multiplicity of interpretations. This rather pliable concept was easily twisted to serve both local and national demands for a more homogenous German nation after 1871. Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 8–10; John Alexander Williams, ‘The movement to preserve the natural Heimat from the *Kaiserreich* to the Third Reich’ in *Central European History*, 29 (3) (1966), 339–384.

³⁵Jena M. Gaines, The politics of national identity in Alsace, *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism/Revue Canadienne des Études sur la Nationalisme*, xxi (1–2) (1994), 99–109.

³⁶Velz, *La vie en Wallonie prussienne*, 29.

the Belgian case there is an added complication. Not long after its inception as an independent state, Belgian nationhood became bifurcated along the Flemish–Walloon fault line, thus complicating the very essence of what it meant to be Belgian. The Belgian state was born out of a rigid opposition to Dutch authoritarianism, and protestant pre-eminence. Once divested of the blanket of Dutch dominance, the extent of the cultural cleavage between the Flemings and Walloons became exacerbated. If following the French Revolution ‘all of France’s traits were set and definitive’, in Belgium after 1830 this was certainly not the case.³⁷ In the words of Jules Destrée, the socialist deputy for Charleroi, not only were there no such things as Belgians, but Belgium was no more than ‘a political state, somewhat artificially constructed’, and ‘not a nation’.³⁸ Even Belgium’s first monarch, Leopold I, observed in 1859 that ‘Belgium does not have a nationality, and seeing the character of its inhabitants, will never be able to have one’.³⁹ Despite the fact that the vast majority of the country’s population was Catholic, in essence the idea of a Belgian nation was imposed from above by a French-speaking elite, to which the Flemish majority was subordinate, both culturally and linguistically. The bifurcation of Belgium along cultural and linguistic lines would dominate the state’s nascent stage. However, the First World War served to ignite a sense of Belgian nationalism. This was in spite of the threat posed by the occupying German authority’s policy of *Flamenpolitik*, which favoured the Flemish majority over the Walloon minority.⁴⁰

While allowing for the degree of divergence between Belgian and German approaches to the concept of nationhood and citizenship, both states shared a trait in common with all states in looking for

³⁷French historian Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), cited in Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 95.

³⁸Jules Destrée, Open Letter to the King concerning the separation of Flanders and Wallonia, cited in Theo Hermans, Louis Vos & Lode Wils (eds), *The Flemish Movement: A Documentary History, 1780–1990* (London & Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone Press, 1992), 206.

³⁹Jean Stengers, La Belgique de 1830, une nationalité de convention? in Hervé Hasquin (ed.), *Histoire et historiens depuis 1830 en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1981), 8–9.

⁴⁰Sarah van Ruyskensvelde, *Wartime Schooling and Education Policy in the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 30.

precedents in the past to justify the exigencies of the present. In the case of Belgium, the various terms employed both during and after the Paris Peace Conference to describe the affinity felt towards the newly annexed districts of Eupen and Malmedy, had the aim of promoting the notion of a shared past that justified the annexation.⁴¹ *Les nouveaux belges*, *les frères retrouvés*, and *les cantons rédimés* were terms used interchangeably to give the impression of what Benedict Anderson refers to as ‘a deep horizontal comradeship’ between these former German subjects and their new Belgian ‘brothers’.⁴² However, such identifiers are, as Anderson would argue, mere constructs, as are all collective identities other than those of family, tribe or perhaps a small village.⁴³

As was the case with his French counterpart Ernest Lavisse, Belgium’s revered historian Henri Pirenne embellished the idea of Belgium within a historical framework that lent a scholarly credibility to the ‘Romantic’ notion of a national past.⁴⁴ In doing so, he constructed the ‘historical essentials’ that reinforced the motif of a Greater Belgium.⁴⁵ Works such as Maurice des Ombiaux’s *Les revendications territoriales de la Belgique* and Eugène Baie’s *La Belgique de demain* contributed to a fomentation of nationalist discourse in the post-war period.⁴⁶ In this way, the journey from myth to that of a durable collective historical consciousness involved not only the literary endeavours of such luminaries as

⁴¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 259–261; Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity* (2nd ed.) (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 71–84.

⁴² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Rev. ed.) (London: Verso [1983], 1991), 7.

⁴³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15.

⁴⁴ Sophie de Schaepdrijver, *Het koninkrijk België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam & Antwerp: Atlas, 1997), 39–40; Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique* (Bruxelles: Henri Lamertin, 1908–1920) & (Maurice Lamertin, 1926–1932); ‘Belgique’ in *Histoire et historiens depuis cinquante ans: Modèles, organisations et résultats du travail historique de 1876 à 1926* (New York, 1927), 51–71.

⁴⁵ Frank R. Ankersmit, *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 81.

⁴⁶ Eugène Baie, *La Belgique de demain—la question du Luxembourg—nécessité d’une barrière rhénane—les Pays-Bas* (Paris: Perrin & Cie, 1916); Maurice des Ombiaux, *Les revendications territoriales de la Belgique* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1916). Philippe Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 81–82.

Nothomb, Pirenne, des Ombiaux, and others, but also the country's political representatives at the Paris Peace Conference.⁴⁷

During the war, an organization called *La Grande Belgique*, later renamed *Le Comité de Politique Nationale* (CPN), was founded by Pierre Nothomb, who served as a junior secretary in the Justice Ministry.⁴⁸ The CPN began to build on the literary and academic foundations of Pirenne and his contemporaries by substantiating the myth of a Belgian nation through imagery and rhetoric. This was achieved while appealing to the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of a country whose sense of nationhood had reached its apogee as a result of the war.⁴⁹ The CPN's primary objective was the reannexation of territory 'taken from Belgium' by the treaties of 1815 and 1839. The treaty of 1839 had resulted in the nine-year-old breakaway Kingdom of Belgium relinquishing its claim to Flemish Zeeland and part of the Duchy of Limburg in return for official recognition by all the signatories as well as the granting of navigation rights on the Scheldt.⁵⁰ In addition, the country was furthermore bound by the terms of a perpetual neutrality endorsed by the Great Powers. Nothomb's concept of a 'Greater Belgium' set much of the tone for the post-war approach later adopted by the Belgian plenipotentiaries

⁴⁷An interesting analogy on historians and nationalism is made by Eric Hobsbawm, who observes that 'Historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin-addicts; we supply the essential raw material for the market'. Eric Hobsbawm, 'Ethnicity and nationalism in Europe today', in *Anthropology Today*, 8 (1) (February 1992), 3–8.

⁴⁸Pierre Nothomb studied law at the Université catholique de Louvain. During the First World War, he served under the Belgian Minister for Justice Carton de Wiart, and was active in propagandizing during the war. He was a Belgian poet, novelist and Catholic politician who founded the movement known as *La Grande Belgique*, which would eventually become the *Comité de Politique Nationale* (CPN). He was a member of the Parti Catholique until 1924, when he left it to form the more radical right-wing party, Action Nationale. He rejoined the Catholic Party in 1927, leaving it once more in 1949 to join the Christian Social Party. He served as a member of the Belgian Sénat from 1936 to 1965. For more on Nothomb and Belgian nationalism, see Francis Balace, 'Pierre Nothomb et les autres nationalistes belges, 1924–1930', in *Pierre Nothomb et le nationalisme belge de 1914 à 1930* (Arlon: Cahiers de l'Académie Luxembourgeoise, 1980).

⁴⁹One of the signatories to a petition organized by Nothomb in December 1918 was none other than the future Royal High Commissioner for Eupen-Malmedy, Herman Baltia.

⁵⁰During the First World War, Belgian defences were hampered by this nub of Dutch territory which had scored a perilous gap in Belgian defences along the Meuse. C.P. Sanger & H.T.J. Norton, *England's Guarantee to Belgium and Luxembourg: with full text of the treaties* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1915), 139–141.

to Paris. Demands made by the CPN included the annexation of a considerable tranche of territory west of the Rhine encompassing Eupen and Malmedy, as well as the city of Aachen, including the towns of Bitburg and Neuerburg.⁵¹ In addition to this, it sought the requisition of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the recovery of Dutch Limburg and Flemish Zeeland.⁵² Indeed, the Paris Peace Conference has been described as Belgium's 'last chance' to revise the treaty of 1839.⁵³

As Roger Collinet has observed, juxtaposed against romantic notions of a 'Greater Belgium', the raw political realities of the post-war period were not lost on Belgium's Catholic politicians. The post-war 'democratic wave', underscored by universal suffrage, would prove to be to the benefit of the socialists in Belgium, and in particular the *Parti Ouvrier Belge* (POB). It was not surprising then that the territories with which the Belgian government of Charles de Broqueville were concerned were staunchly Catholic, thus providing a useful counter-weight to the anticipated socialist tide following the introduction of universal male suffrage in the wake of the war.⁵⁴ However, one voice within the Belgian delegation was out of tune with the appetite for annexation, whether of Dutch or German Territory. Émile Vandervelde, leader of the POB, was, like most of his contemporaries on the Left, opposed to the concept of territorial annexation. Despite Vandervelde's stance, the Belgian delegation displayed a certain naivety in what it hoped to achieve at the peace negotiations. In the end, however, the outcome of the negotiations in Paris saw Belgian hopes of territorial aggrandizement evaporate

⁵¹Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 81; Klaus Pabst, Das Problem der deutsch-belgischen Grenze in der letzten 150 Jahre, *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins* (1965) 77, 198–199.

⁵²Although Belgium also possessed the ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend, they were by no means as significant in terms of either size or economy. Brussels would also have benefited greatly in terms of trade in the event of Flemish Zeeland falling to Belgium. Miller, *My Diary at the Conference of Paris*, IV, 435–437; Marks, *Innocent Abroad*, 139 & 146–147; Miller, *Belgian Foreign Policy*, 72–78; Pierre Nothomb, La déclaration de Sainte Adresse (14 février 1916): ses origines et ses conséquences, *Le Flambeau*, 31 January 1922, 10–36.

⁵³Hubert P. Van Tuyll, Last chance: Belgium at Versailles, in Benjamin Kaplan, Marybeth Carlson & Laura Cruz (eds), *Boundaries and their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009), 178.

⁵⁴Roger Collinet, *L'annexion d'Eupen et Malmedy à la Belgique en 1920* (Verviers: Librairie 'La Dérive', 1986), 5–6.

almost entirely.⁵⁵ Apart from gaining the colonial territory of Ruanda-Urundi, which was mandated to Belgium by Great Britain in 1920 (not without a considerable period of procrastination by the latter),⁵⁶ the two German districts of Eupen-Malmedy, together with Neutral and Prussian Moresnet, were to be the only tangible territorial acquisitions the country would have to show for its efforts.⁵⁷ Moresnet had belonged to the Duchy of Limburg until 1815 when, following the defeat of Napoleon, the Treaty of Vienna divided it between the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and Prussia. However, an oversight during the drafting stage of the treaty left a small triangular part of the territory containing a number of zinc spar and lead mines unassigned to either power.⁵⁸ In 1816, a provisional arrangement between the Netherlands and Prussia, known as the *Aachener Grenzvertrag*, placed the disputed 3.13 square kilometres of Neutral Moresnet under the administration of two commissioners, one Dutch and one Prussian.⁵⁹ In 1830, the Dutch interest was assumed by Belgium following its independence. This situation lasted until the end of the Great War when, under Articles 32 and 33 of the Versailles Treaty, both Neutral and Prussian Moresnet were unconditionally ceded to Belgium.⁶⁰ Juxtaposed against the great expectations that consumed the minds of Belgium's representatives at the Paris Peace

⁵⁵Hymans was assisted at the Paris Peace Conference by Émile Vandervelde the leader of the POB, and Jules van den Heuvel who later had a seat on the Reparations Commission. Archives du Palais Royal (APR), I/981, 'La Belgique et la paix' 8 March 1920.

⁵⁶By the Treaty of Versailles, i. 22, Belgium was granted a mandate over the former German colony of Ruanda-Urundi. This was confirmed by the League of Nations on 20 July 1922 and reaffirmed on 31 August 1923, William R. Louis, Great Britain and the African peace settlement of 1919, *American Historical Review*, 71 (1966), 875–892.

⁵⁷Alfred Minke & Fabrice Müllender, *800 Jahre Eynatten: 1213–2013 Beiträge zur Dorfgeschichte: Band 1 / mit einer chronologischen Übersicht 1000–1750* (Eynatten: Verkehrsverein Eynatten, 2013), 88–90.

⁵⁸A mining company called the *Société Anonyme des Mines et Fonderies de Zinc de la Vieille Montagne* was established there in 1837. The territory became a lucrative location for industry and investment. However, it also experienced considerable levels of smuggling owing to its neutral status. At the turn of the century, the linguistic movement Esperanto considered making Neutral Moresnet the first Esperanto-speaking state, having established its offices there. Iwan Jungbluth, *Der Bärrech—die Neutralität—der Schmuggel* (Eupen: Grenz Echo Verlag, 2011), 5–6.

⁵⁹These were later replaced by a panel of ten councillors and a burgomaster.

⁶⁰Minke & Müllender, *800 Jahre Eynatten*, 88–90.

Conference, the rather anti-climactic acquisition of Eupen-Malmedy and Moresnet may thus be viewed as nothing more than meagre crumbs of consolation that had fallen from the table of post-war negotiations.⁶¹ The future governor of Eupen-Malmedy, Herman Baltia, viewed the granting of such a diminutive portion of territory to Belgium as akin to ‘giving a gourmand a bone to chew’.⁶² However, in time, this tranche of territory would become a bone of contention as much within Belgium as it would between Belgium and Germany.

By the law of 15 September 1919, a provisional government of indefinite duration was established in Eupen-Malmedy to oversee its transition from German to Belgian sovereignty. The law provided for the appointment of a Royal High Commissioner entrusted with full legislative and executive powers to head the transitory regime.⁶³ The man eventually chosen to undertake this task was Lieutenant-General Herman Baltia, a decorated war hero born in Brussels, but of mixed Luxembourg and German parentage. The success of Baltia’s mission to make *bon belges* out of former German subjects would be measured against his regime’s ability to combine the political and administrative incorporation of the territory with the cultural and national assimilation of its people.⁶⁴

Under Article 34 of the Versailles Treaty dictated to Germany in the wake of its defeat, it had to ‘renounce in favour of Belgium all rights and title over the territory comprising the whole of the *Kreise* of Eupen

⁶¹Although Belgium also possessed the ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend, they were by no means as significant as Antwerp. Brussels would also have benefited greatly in terms of trade in the event of Flemish Zeeland falling to Belgium. Miller, *My Diary at the Conference of Paris*, 435–437; Marks, *Innocent Abroad*, 139 & pp. 146–147; Miller, *Belgian Foreign Policy*, 72–78; Pierre Nothomb, La déclaration de Sainte Adresse (14 février 1916): ses origines et ses conséquences, *Le Flambeau*, 31 January 1922, 10–36 (11–14).

⁶²Landesarchiv Nordrhein Westfalen (LANRW), Sammlung Baltia, RW/10/5, Erinnerungen des belgischen Generals Baltia, 1918–1922, Gouverneur (Hochkommissar) für die abgetretenen Gebiete Eupen-Malmedy aus seiner Tätigkeit (Hereafter: Erinnerungen), 0007–0009; Els Herrebout, *Generalleutnant Herman Baltia: Memoiren 1920–1925* (Eupen: Archives générales du Royaume, 2011) (Hereafter: *Memoiren*), 21.

⁶³Loi concernant le gouvernement des territoires annexés à la Belgique par le traité de Versailles du 28 juin 1919, 15 September 1919, Annales Parlementaires Belge (APB), *Chambre*, 17 October 1919, 5480; Hans Doepgen, *Die Abtretung des Gebietes von Eupen-Malmedy an Belgien im Jahre 1920* (Bonn: Ludwrig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1966), 98–101.

⁶⁴Rapport sur l’activité, i, 5–7.

and Malmedy'.⁶⁵ Any perceived disadvantages in acquiring this territory from a Belgian perspective were initially subsumed by concerns for its future security, and the desire for economic recompense in terms of its extensive forestry and agriculture, quite apart that is from the palpable appetite for retribution.⁶⁶ Yet to many inside Belgium, gaining Eupen-Malmedy risked inviting trouble rather than securing the borders of the state. So soon after the war and the oppressive German occupation, a tangible distrust among the Belgian populace towards these *frères retrouvés* was in evidence in both the press and in parliament.⁶⁷ Attempts by certain sections of the Belgian press to whip up nationalistic sentiment by advocating territorial annexation did not produce the desired effect. Even during the war, the Belgian government in exile in Le Havre was hardly of *una voce* behind the annexation. The socialist minister Émile Vandervelde argued during a cabinet meeting on 24 February 1916 that the de-annexation (*désannexion*) of Eupen-Malmedy would have the potential to become an apple of discord between Germany and Belgium in the post-war period.⁶⁸ In time, Vandervelde's prophesy would come to pass as Belgium's annexation of Eupen-Malmedy took on a more pronounced political potency, becoming at once the *pièce de résistance* of German revanchism and the coping stone of Belgium's post-war recovery.

This study demonstrates how Belgium's approach to the assimilation of '*les cantons rédimés*' was flawed from the outset. Even before the annexation had become definitive following the outcome of the much-discredited popular consultation, the government, in the words of Baltia, seemed 'ill-prepared [...] to deal with the numerous questions and delicate problems that had to be resolved'.⁶⁹ Even as early as the negotiations in Paris, Belgium's attitude to Eupen-Malmedy was lukewarm at best, until it soon became clear that save for some

⁶⁵Treaty of Versailles, Article, iii, 34.

⁶⁶Robert Devleeshouwer, L'opinion publique et les revendications territoriales belges à la fin de la première guerre mondiale, in *Mélanges offerts à G. Jacquemyns* (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, Editions de l'Institute de Sociologie, 1968), 207–238 (209–211).

⁶⁷*Le Courrier de l'Armée*, 23 November 1919 and 21 December 1919.

⁶⁸Freddy Cremer & Werner Mießen. 1996. *Spuren: Materialien zur Geschichte der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens* (Eupen: Werner Miessen), 8.

⁶⁹Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 26.

colonial mandates in Africa, no other territorial acquisitions were on offer. From the establishment of the provisional Eupen-Malmedy government in 1920 to its termination in 1925, Brussels seemed ignorant as to the magnitude of Baltia's mission. Chapter 2 explores the effect that the push towards annexation had on the people of these districts. It assesses developments on the ground in Eupen and Malmedy from 1919 while the protracted peace negotiations continued in Paris. The impact of the sudden transfer from German sovereignty to allied occupation, and the ensuing struggle between pro and anti-annexationist camps for political advantage in the days leading up to the signing of the treaty are also examined. During this time, it was not only the border between Belgium and Germany that had become blurred. The dividing line between politics and religion in the territory was equally obscured. Still under the auspices of the Bishopric of Cologne, pro-German clerics in Eupen and in Malmedy used their privileged positions to dissuade their congregations from attachment to Belgium. The tug-of-war for the hearts and minds of the population continued apace even after the appointment of Herman Baltia as Royal High Commissioner for Eupen-Malmedy in September 1919.

When Baltia assumed office in January 1920, he did so not as someone elected by the people, but as one imposed by what was up to then a foreign power. His role was described by none other than the Belgian prime minister, Léon Delacroix, as akin to that of 'a colonial governor'. If Baltia were indeed expected to perform his duties in that manner, what did this say about the people over whom he was to rule? As shall be argued in Chap. 3, despite Delacroix's unfortunate terminology, Baltia's role was more on a par with that of a commissarial dictator in the classic Roman sense, as opposed to that of a colonial governor or a dictator in the sovereign sense.⁷⁰ Whatever the extent of Baltia's power in the districts, he would still have to find a *modus vivendi* with the people of Eupen-Malmedy if he were to succeed in his mission of nation-building.

⁷⁰Vincent O'Connell, Dictating democracy: The impact of governor Baltia's 'dictatorship' on local government in Eupen-Malmedy 1919–1925, *International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* (Special Issue on the rise and fall of municipal government.) vol. 7 (1–2) (Spring 2011), 160–192; George Schwab, *The Challenge of the Exception: An Introduction to the Political Ideas of Carl Schmitt between 1921 and 1936* (2nd ed.) (New York & London: Greenwood Press, 1989), 32.

Stefan Berger has demonstrated how border identities are negotiated between the inhabitants and the state into which they are absorbed. Governments may be suspicious of border populations as people who do not belong to the national community. Thus, the project of nation-building which follows the ceding of such territories sees the incoming regime attempt to control and dictate the patterns of political and social engagement.⁷¹ This was certainly the case in Eupen-Malmedy. As Belgian legislation was gradually introduced during the initial phase of the transitory process, what transpired was a peeling back of the layers of legislation that had accumulated under previous regimes. These included temporary measures introduced during the allied occupation of the territory.⁷² However, Belgium's rather lacklustre approach to the unfolding situation in *la nouvelle Belgique* was already evident in the ad hoc attitude shown by government departments that were called upon to facilitate the provisional government during its nascent phase. Baltia was less than impressed by what he regarded as a lack of patriotism by many functionaries who had been solicited to take up positions in Eupen-Malmedy, but refused. Many of those who agreed to transfer to Malmedy fell short of Baltia's expectations and, as he put it, became 'sworn enemies' of his regime.⁷³ The relationship between Baltia and Brussels is thus explored, and provides further proof of Belgium's less than enthusiastic attitude towards Eupen-Malmedy, even at this critical stage.

By Baltia's own admission, during the earlier stages of the assimilation project, less than 5% of the population of Eupen-Malmedy wanted to become Belgian.⁷⁴ This in itself demonstrated the extent of the challenge that awaited him, in turning these former subjects of the *Kaiserreich* into '*bons belges*'.⁷⁵ The first hurdle that he would have to overcome would

⁷¹Stefan Berger, Border regions, hybridity and national identity: The cases of Alsace and Masuria, in Q. Edward Wang & Franz Leander Fillafer (eds), *The Many Faces of Clío: Cross Cultural Approaches to Historiography* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007) 366–381 (367–368); Malcolm Anderson, The Political Problems of Frontier regions, in Malcolm Anderson (ed.), *Frontier Regions in Western Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 1983), 1–33.

⁷²Rapport sur l'activité, i, 17–20.

⁷³Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 24.

⁷⁴Herman Baltia cited in *L'Express* 29 August 1922. Royal High Commissioner Baltia is also referred to as Governor Baltia, both in official correspondence and in the popular press.

⁷⁵Rapport sur l'activité, i, 5–7.

be to ensure a successful outcome to the ‘public expression of opinion’, or popular consultation, where the inhabitants of the newly annexed territory would have the opportunity to decide on whether or not they wished to become Belgian. Under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, the consultation had to be held within six months of the treaty coming into effect.⁷⁶ Chapter 4 opens with a discussion on the utility of such a mechanism in determining the future status of contested territories under the Versailles Treaty. The differences between the form of consultation undertaken in Eupen and Malmedy and those organized in the other territories are thus explored. Heinz Doepgen’s 1966 study on the consultation is helpful as an introduction to this aspect of the transitory process.⁷⁷ While the outcome of the consultation was successful in the short term, the manner of its execution would cause immeasurable damage to Baltia’s reputation and to that of the Belgian state over the longer term. The tactics employed by the transitory authority come under scrutiny here, and the analysis is aided by an examination of correspondence between Belgian officials and reports by their German counterparts who kept a close eye on events as they unfolded. The chapter furthermore assesses the motivations of the people in Eupen-Malmedy during the consultation period, in terms of their willingness to come forward and openly express their opinions outside of the registration process. The structure of the consultation was such that only those who wished to protest against the definitive annexation of the territory were obliged to sign the register. Therefore, when only 271 out of an eligible electorate of over 33,000 availed of the facility, one is left wondering whether this was indeed a *fait accompli*, or a measure of the intimidation felt by would-be voters who dared to register their opinion for fear of retribution by Baltia’s authorities. Interviews given by residents to international newspaper correspondents at the time provide clear evidence of the threat of intimidation, and the coercive measures employed by Baltia’s agents. This contributed greatly to the high level of non-participation by the vast majority of inhabitants. Be that as it may, the volatile political situation inside Germany, which at this time was teetering on the brink of revolution, left many at a loss as to which way to turn.

⁷⁶Treaty of Versailles, Article, iii, 34.

⁷⁷Heinz Doepgen, *Die Abtretung des Gebietes von Eupen-Malmedy an Belgien im Jahre 1920* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1966).

The efforts of the German authorities and irredentist Germans to have the result of the consultation overturned are also afforded attention.⁷⁸ Following the League of Nations' endorsement of the result, Belgian sovereignty over the territory was definitively established on 20 September 1920. Thus began in earnest a process whereby the last vestiges of the Prussian–German period would finally be erased and replaced with a Belgian model.

Chapter 5 details how Baltia executed this phase of the assimilation. Baltia did not explicitly distinguish (at least not in his terminology) between political and legislative incorporation on the one hand, and cultural assimilation on the other. Instead, he employed the term 'assimilation' interchangeably to cover all aspects of the process of 'reattachment'. However, in his third report to the Belgian interior minister he uses the term 'Belgicization' to encapsulate the entirety of the assimilation process.⁷⁹ That said, he readily acknowledged the much more difficult task of reforming mindsets, as opposed to merely replacing legislation. Alongside a plethora of important issues, not least that of 'putting some order to the chaotic state in which the local legislation found itself', the exchange of German marks, policing and delivering on expectations in the area of economy and trade, Baltia identified three specific areas that he believed were essential to the longer-term success of the project of assimilation.⁸⁰ These were education, the reform of local government, and the conversion of the pro-German clergy in the districts toward Belgium. In this way, he took as his exemplar the French *modus operandi* in Alsace-Lorraine.

In his memoirs, recounting his time as head of the government of Eupen-Malmedy (which appear to have been written around 1929), Baltia makes a direct comparison between the assimilatory tactics employed by the French in Alsace and those practised by his regime. Even before his appointment as Royal High Commissioner for Eupen-Malmedy had been finalized, the Belgian government had taken a keen interest in how the French were progressing with their reannexation of

⁷⁸William Carr, *A History of Germany, 1815–1990* (4th ed.) (New York & London: Bloomsbury, 1991), 236–251.

⁷⁹SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/193, *Haut Commissariat Royal d'Eupen Malmedy, Rapport sur l'activité*.

⁸⁰SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/192, *Haut-Commissariat Royal d'Eupen Malmedy, Rapport sur l'activité*.

‘the lost provinces’. This was a process begun some eighteen months prior to the establishment of Baltia’s regime. The French experience in Alsace-Lorraine greatly influenced the approach taken by Baltia, whether in terms of emulating French methods or avoiding them.⁸¹ The chapter begins with a brief focus on the symbiosis between the regime established in Alsace-Lorraine and that in operation in Eupen-Malmedy. The chapter tracks the replacement of the German structure of local government with that of the Belgian communal system, as well as the transformation of the education system in the districts, a key element in Baltia’s efforts to recalibrate the pedagogical compass towards Belgium. Emphasis is also placed on Baltia’s efforts to extirpate pro-German clerics from the territory, or at least to limit their influence, as in his view ‘all the clerics are [German] patriots and feel strong, because they are part of a spiritual power on which the public authorities rely.’⁸² He therefore recognized the essential importance of each of these areas in the assimilation process, which in retrospect he categorizes as temporal, cultural and spiritual. As shall be argued, none of these categorizations is exclusive, as even within the temporal nexus of the school system, the issues of language and identity were to the fore as important signifiers of culture and identity. In the same way, the divine role of the clergy was not averse to impinging on Caesar’s territory, as pulpits became important portals of anti-Belgian agitation. These aspects of the transitory regime’s operations were first examined by Klaus Pabst in his 1964 ground-breaking work *Eupen Malmedy in der belgischen Regierungs- und Parteienpolitik 1914–1940*. They are revisited here in order to highlight the most essential and sensitive aspects of the assimilatory project. An additional element in this regard was the culture of commemoration and how these former subjects of the *Kaiserreich* remembered and honoured their loved ones who had fought for Kaiser and *Vaterland* in the Great War. The chapter examines the extent to which this process was both accommodated and restricted under Baltia.

The provisional Eupen-Malmedy government had from its very origins been the target of much criticism in ‘old Belgium’, as questions over the more excessive aspects of his regime began to be aired. By

⁸¹AAEB, Eupen-Malmedy, 10/792/1/9814, Belgian Interior Minister de Broqueville to Foreign Minister Paul Hymans, 10 July 1919.

⁸²Erinnerungen, 00096; Herrebut, *Memoiren*, 104.

1922, comparisons were already being drawn between Baltia 'the dictator' in Eupen-Malmedy and a recently appointed fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, in Italy. Having aligned the political, educational and religious structures with those of the Belgian state, a growing opposition to any further prolongation of the regime called time on Baltia's provisional government. If Baltia were to be removed, this begged the question as to what form the definitive attachment of 'New Belgium' would take. This would be the first contentious post-Baltia problem to occupy the Brussels government directly.

When the transitory regime was eventually terminated in 1925, it seemed to Baltia a premature step, as in his opinion the cultural and national assimilation of the inhabitants needed a much longer incubation period. Nevertheless, it was now expected, particularly by those in *la nouvelle Belgique* who either welcomed or had resigned themselves to this *fait accompli*, that a more seamless and egalitarian relationship would develop between old and new Belgium. However, this relationship would not be so straightforward. The onus now fell directly on Brussels to nurture those civic and cultural ties that had developed under Baltia. Chapter 6 examines how, against a backdrop of economic uncertainty at home and political instability in Germany, a certain degree of ambivalence began to colour the relationship between Brussels and *la nouvelle Belgique*. By now, the two districts had become three, with St Vith having become a separate administrative district to the south of Malmedy since 1921.⁸³ The rather ambiguous attitude of the Belgian state at this time is best demonstrated by seeing just how close it actually came to selling the cantons back to Germany in return for some much-needed finance to ameliorate its own rather dire economic situation. This was a time of duplicitous diplomacy, when the fortunes of the people of Eupen-Malmedy were secondary to the interests of political elites and national economies, whether French, German or Belgian.

Manfred J. Enssle's focus on German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann's diplomatic endeavours to reclaim the lost districts is the most insightful account of the protracted deliberations to date.⁸⁴

⁸³A decree of 19 October 1921 created a third administrative district, separating St Vith from Malmedy.

⁸⁴Manfred J. Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism: Germany, Belgium and the Eupen-Malmedy Question 1919-1929* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980).

Together with the work of Jacques Bariéty, who makes use of archival material from the Quai d'Orsay, their analysis provides a firm foundation for the sixth chapter of the present work. The attempted 'Rückkauf' or 'Rückgabe' undermined the *bona fides* which had been built up under Baltia, and although unsuccessful, was seriously damaging to Brussels' position in Eupen, Malmédy and St Vith. In the post-Baltia phase, it appears that no single overarching approach towards the territory existed, and that certain Belgian representatives kept an open mind on the sale or exchange of Eupen-Malmédy, even after the outright rejection of the putative deal by France.⁸⁵

The extensive historiography on Eupen-Malmédy in the interwar period acknowledges the weakness of Belgian policy in the region, and how much of this stemmed from Brussels' misunderstanding of the peculiarities pertaining to the territory.⁸⁶ The controversial decades of the interwar period in Eupen-Malmédy had, up to the 1960s, been covered over with the palimpsest of what the late Tony Judt has elsewhere referred to as 'selective forgetting', where communities as well as individuals shield certain episodes or events of the past from intrusion by historians.⁸⁷ The German historian Freddy Cremer describes

⁸⁵Jacques Bariéty, *Le projet de rétrocession d'Eupen-Malmédy par la Belgique à l'Allemagne, et la France (1925–1926): Un cas d'utilisation de l'arme financière en politique internationale*, in *Les relations franco-belges de 1830 à 1934* (Metz: Centre de Recherches Relations Internationales à l'Université de Metz, 1975), 325–348.

⁸⁶The historiography on Eupen-Malmédy since 1945 has been meticulously chronicled in terms of the German-speaking community's experience, in particular by Werner Mießen in his double volume *Die Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens: Bibliografie: 1945–2002* (2 vols.) (Brüssel: Generalstaatsarchiv und Staatsarchive in der Provinz, 2003). This is complemented by *Die Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens; Bibliografie: 2003–2008* (Brüssel: Generalstaatsarchiv und Staatsarchive in der Provinz, 2009) and by his most recent work *Die Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens: Bibliografie 2009–2013: mit Nachträgen 1945–2008* (Bruxelles: Archives Générales du Royaume, 2014). See also Werner Mießen, *Bibliographie zu Geschichte, Sprache und Literatur der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 1945–1983* (pref. Marcel Lejoly) (Brüssel: Belgische Bibliographie Kommission, 1986).

⁸⁷Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London, 2005), pp. 803–831; see also his interview with Donald A. Yerxa 'Postwar: An interview with Tony Judt' in *Historically Speaking*, vii (3) (January–February 2006), <http://www.bu.edu/historic/hs/judt.html>.

this phenomenon as ‘amnesia as therapy’.⁸⁸ As the author of the first truly authoritative and objective work on Eupen-Malmedy in the interwar period, Klaus Pabst observed how Belgium’s political forces maintained the ceded territory of Eupen Malmedy ‘in a kind of political limbo between an old and new homeland’ for the twenty or so years of the interwar period.⁸⁹ One cannot, however, overlook the degree of success achieved by Baltia during his time as governor of Eupen-Malmedy. Pabst’s seminal contribution, which covers the entire interwar period, relied mostly on German archival sources. As was the case with Enssle’s work also, Pabst was unable to access the Belgian diplomatic archives concerning the period under study here, owing to the restrictions in place at that time. This present study thus incorporates relevant manuscript sources to further enrich our understanding of the interwar period. By incorporating some of Baltia’s private reminiscences from his war diary this work also places the much-overlooked Governor of Eupen-Malmedy at the centre of the assimilation project. The study begins by exploring the fluid socio-political environment in which the inhabitants of this troubled territory were forced to consider their fate. Having emerged from the First World War on the losing side, the people of this borderland territory would soon find that the much longed-for peace would usher in tremendous change, and with it considerable challenges, as they awaited their collective fate on the threshold of transition.

⁸⁸Freddy Cremer cited in ‘Freddy Cremer beklagt “Amnesie als Therapie” *Grenz Echo*’, 29 September 2010.

⁸⁹Pabst, *Eupen-Malmedy*, 209.

On the Threshold of Transition: Eupen-Malmedy in 1919—Between Occupation and Annexation

With the end of the war, the allied forces of France, Great Britain, and the United States, together with Belgium, agreed to occupy separate zones in the Rhineland as a guarantee of German adherence to the terms of the Versailles Treaty, and particularly its payment of reparations.¹ Eupen and Malmedy fell under French and British military occupation respectively. Between the negotiations of the treaty in Paris in the spring of 1919 and its coming into force in January 1920, a twilight period of uncertainty saw pro and anti-annexationist camps vie for the hearts and minds of this borderland population. In this amorphous environment, old certainties evaporated into a cloud of confusion. Still reeling from the shock collapse of the German Empire, the inhabitant now had to endure an allied military occupation. As described by the man who would eventually become the general secretary to the transitory government, Pierre Van Werveke, these people were ‘neither German nor Belgian’. In essence, they resembled political foundlings who had been taken from the *Vaterland* into which they had been absorbed over a century earlier following the defeat of Napoleon.² As one sovereign power prepared to eclipse that of another

¹The British Army of Occupation was based in Cologne. The French area extended to the Prussian Rhineland including the bridgehead at Mainz. The Belgians took charge of a thin sliver of territory between Aachen and the border with Holland, while the Americans were based at Koblenz. Margaret Pawley, *The Watch on the Rhine: The Military Occupation of the Rhineland, 1918–1930* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 1–2.

²It is impossible to accept that the inhabitants remain German while the territory is Belgian. However, one cannot declare them Belgian since Article 36 (of the

in the region, the tensions and rivalries at play on the ground in the meantime saw individuals and communities exposed to the mercy of economic, political and cultural elites, whether German or Belgian.

But such volatility was not confined to the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy. Inside Belgium, considerable divisions existed between those who championed the ideal of a Greater Belgium and those who saw in the annexation a poisoned chalice from which Belgium should dare not sip.³ In the meantime, Brussels considered to what degree localized opposition and the influence of pro-German organizations might serve to undermine Belgian initiatives in the territory. From a German perspective and indeed in terms of the vast majority of Eupen-Malmedy's inhabitants, what once had been unthinkable now seemed at the very least a worrying prospect. Along with Alsace and Lorraine, Germany was to be relieved of its two most westerly districts of of Eupen and Malmedy.

Whilst talk of a Republic of the Rhine did not seem viable to most, some considered the possibility of a union with the left bank region of Westphalia.⁴ As for Germany, neither the German President Ebert nor its then Chancellor Philipp Scheidemann were believed to possess the

Versailles Treaty) states that they cannot acquire full Belgian nationality to the exclusion of German nationality until the definitive transfer of the territory.' SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/191, Haut-Commissariat Royal d'Eupen Malmedy, Rapport sur l'activité du Gouvernement d'Eupen et de Malmedy, i., January 1920–July 1920 (hereafter, Rapport sur l'activité, i.), 137; Joseph Nisot, 'La nationalité des habitants des cercles d'Eupen-Malmedy d'après le traité de Paix', *Journal de Droit International*, 48 (1921), 833–840.

³Robert Devleeshouwer, 'L'opinion publique et les revendications territoriales belges à la fin de la première guerre mondiale', *Mélanges offerts à G. Jacquemyns* (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, Editions de l'Institut de Sociologie, 1968), 207–238.

⁴The Mayor of Cologne, Konrad Adenauer, advocated the creation of Rhineland republics within the Reich in order to prevent the cession of the Saarland and Eupen-Malmedy. Germany's Foreign Minister Brockdorff-Rantzau, along with President Ebert and Chancellor Philipp Scheidemann, rejected the idea. A separatist movement under Dr Hans Dorten sought the assistance of the French to achieve a separation from Germany, while in East Prussia Count Batocki-Friebe raised the possibility of a union between East Prussia and Poland if the peace terms proved too onerous. Meanwhile, in Bavaria, Georg Hein promoted the aim of a federation of southern Germany with Austria. The National Archives (TNA), FO/371/7521, French propaganda for separation of the Rhineland from Germany, Lord Kilmarnock to Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 11 September 1922, 220–226; Hagen Schulze, *Akten der Reichskanzlei: Weimarer Republik: Das Kabinet Scheidemann* (Boppard am Rhein: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1971), xli–xlii; *Akten zur deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, Serie A, 1918–1925* (14 vols.) ii (May–December 1919)

qualities necessary to rescue a German state teetering on the brink of implosion. In this light, a number of people placed their fervent hope in the return of the monarchy.⁵ For many of the Kaiser's former subjects, the prospect of being ruled by anything other than a monarch was beyond the realms of consideration. Perhaps a Belgian monarch who, after all, was a direct descendant of the first Belgian king, Leopold I, himself of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, seemed a more endearing prospect than being party to a revolutionary republic as was being fought over in Germany. As well as monarchical allegiance, the Catholic Church also held considerable sway over the mindsets of the inhabitants of this largely rural territory. The vast majority of clerics, it seemed, were as devoted to the *Vaterland* as they were to the Holy See. Even allowing for the difficult years of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, their loyalty to the German Empire was never in doubt.⁶

The decision to annex a territory heavily populated by people who had so recently taken up arms against Belgium was not to the liking of all Belgians. Even among those Belgians most amenable to the concept of annexation, certain safeguards needed to be implemented. Once those fears had been somewhat assuaged or at least offset against the perceived gains attached to the incorporation of the two districts, the Belgian Government would then be ready to move to the next step: the establishment of a provisional government.

(Göttingen: Auswärtiges Amt, 1984), 81; Fritz Klein, 'Between Compiègne and Versailles: The Germans on the way from a misunderstood defeat to an unwanted peace', in Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman & Elisabeth Glaser (eds.), *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 203–220.

Klaus Reimer, *Rheinlandfrage und Rheinlandbewegung (1918–1933): Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der regionalistischen Bestrebungen in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1979), 96–100.

⁵ Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (AAEB), 10.792/I/I3, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport du Lieutenant General Commandant Le Chef d'État-Major Coppejans, Ministère de la Guerre to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 3ème rapport mensuel sur l'état d'esprit des populations de la 4ème Zone d'Occupation, 7 March 1919.

⁶ Christoph Brüll, 'Un passé mouvementé: l'Histoire de la communauté germanophone de Belgique' in K. Stangherlin (ed.), *La communauté germanophone de Belgique – Die Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens* (Bruxelles: La Chartre, 2005), 22.

THE IMMEDIATE POST-WAR SITUATION IN EUPEN-MALMEDY

The cession of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium fell far short of Belgian expectations in advance of the Paris Peace Conference. In light of the great suffering endured by its people during the war and the subsequent occupation, the Belgian delegation came to Paris with considerable aspirations, not least of territorial aggrandizement. In April 1916, the British prime minister, Herbert Asquith, had asserted that Britain no longer wanted Belgium to suffer from the 'wanton and wicked invasion of her freedom', and that 'that which has been broken down must be repaired and restored'.⁷ For Belgium's delegation to the Peace Conference, the term restoration had a much deeper resonance, however. In effect, it translated as a revision of the treaties of 1839. These had resulted in the nine-year-old breakaway Kingdom of Belgium relinquishing its claim to Flemish Zeeland and part of the Duchy of Limburg in return for official recognition by all of the signatories, as well as the granting of navigation rights on the Scheldt.⁸ In addition, the country was furthermore bound by the terms of a perpetual neutrality which was to be upheld by the Great Powers.⁹ If Chancellor Bethmann-Holweg had deemed the 1839 treaty 'a scrap of paper' before the invasion of Belgium, in the aftermath of the war it would become the blueprint on which Belgian hopes of territorial aggrandizement were to be based.¹⁰

⁷Archives Générales du Royaume (AGR), Jaspas Papers, 2472/199 [microfilm], Lord Asquith to the House of Commons, 10 April 1919.

⁸B.M. Telders, *La révision des traités de 1839* (La Haye: M. Nijhoff, 1935), 4–16; 'Treaty between Great Britain, Austria, France, Prussia and Russia, on the one part, and the Netherlands on the other, relative to the Netherlands and Belgium' in *British and Foreign State Papers*, xxvii (London: Harrison & Son, 1856), 990–1002; Freddy Cremer & Werner Mießen, *Spuren: Materialien zur Geschichte der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens* (Hereafter, *Spuren*) (Eupen: Werner Mießen, 1996), 7; Klaus Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy in der belgischen Regierungs- und Parteienpolitik 1914–1940, *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, 76 (1964), 232–246; R. Devleeshouwer, 'L'opinion publique et les revendications territoriales belges à la fin de la Première Guerre Mondiale 1918–1919' in *Mélanges offerts à G. Jacquemyns* (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1968), 207–215.

⁹Jean Baptiste Nothomb & Théodore Juste, *Essai historique et politique sur la révolution belge*, i (4th ed.) (Bruxelles: M. Weissenbruch, 1876), 213–224.

¹⁰Commenting on his use of the term 'scrap of paper' in a meeting with the British Ambassador to Germany, Sir Edward Goschen, on 4 August 1914, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg charged that his views had been misrepresented. He held that far from being a mere scrap of paper for Germany, the treaties of 1839 had been deemed meaningless by

On the separate question of Luxembourg, Paul Hymans, Belgium's senior representative at the Paris Peace Conference argued that for the Great Powers to maintain the Duchy in its pre-war state would mean to hold firm to an obsolete concept of unarmed neutrality, which Europe could no longer afford. Luxembourg 'needed support', and would only find it at the side of either Belgium or France. Since France had no apparent pretensions over Luxembourg, this left the door open for a rapprochement with Belgium. The Belgian delegation invoked the historical ties and affinities shared between the Grand Duchy and the Kingdom of Belgium. Asked by American Secretary of State Robert Lansing whether he thought a referendum on the future of Luxembourg was a good idea, Hymans replied that in light of Luxembourg's difficult situation, a 'free and reflective' referendum would be unachievable. He preferred instead 'a conversation between the two governments.'¹¹

This was largely wishful thinking on Belgium's part. On St Valentine's Day 1916, the foreign ministers of France, Great Britain and Russia made a solemn declaration to Belgium at Sainte Adresse.¹² The Sainte Adresse declaration asserted that once the time came, Belgium would be called upon to participate in the peace negotiations, and that the Entente would not put a stop to hostilities until Belgium had regained her independence in both political and economic terms. In addition, the declaration promised that Belgium was to be largely indemnified for the losses suffered as a result of the war.¹³ The Entente powers furthermore vowed to give their aid to Belgium in terms of financial and commercial relief. However, no specific reference to territorial compensation was made at Sainte Adresse. In July of that year, when asked if, in the event of an allied victory, Belgium would obtain any territory in Europe beyond her original frontiers, the British foreign secretary, Lord Balfour, simply

Belgium's own forfeiture of its neutrality as a result of its relations with England. However, he conceded that 'no absolute proof existed' of any arrangement between the two countries. 'Scrap of paper, German version', *New York Times*, 25 January 1915.

¹¹Archives du Palais Royal, Bruxelles (APR), 969, Conférence de Versailles, Comptes-rendu de l'audition de Monsieur Hymans, 11 February 1919.

¹²Paul van Zuylen, *Les mains libres: politique extérieure de la Belgique, 1914-1920* (Bruxelles, Desclée De Brouwer, 1950), 63-64.

¹³AGR, T.031, Jaspar Papers, 199, Déclaration de Sainte Adresse, 14 February 1916, Compte rendu, 16 April 1916.

retorted, 'No.'¹⁴ Nevertheless, the question of indemnification was one which Hymans believed augured well for Belgium.¹⁵ But the reality was to be quite different.¹⁶

On 12 February, a special commission was established to deliberate on Belgium's demands, comprising members from France, Great Britain, the United States, Italy and Japan.¹⁷ Although initially at Versailles no specific reference had been made to Eupen, the Belgian plenipotentiaries were gradually won over by arguments in favour of its annexation, most notably from the military.¹⁸ The deftness by which Eupen would later be conflated into the term *cantons wallons* is a pertinent example of the lengths to which the fabric of Belgium's post-war national narrative would be stretched.¹⁹ Writing to the British foreign secretary,

¹⁴AGR, T.031, Jaspar Papers, 2472/199 'Question posé à Monsieur Balfour'[microfilm].

¹⁵APR, 969, Conférence de Versailles 1919, 969, Compte-rendu de l'audition de Monsieur Hymans; Représentants des cinq grandes puissances, 11 February 1919; Sally Marks, *Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 137–142.

¹⁶The discrepancy that existed between Belgium's post-war expectations, and the grim reality that awaited its delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, was due in no small part to the aura of mistrust that had developed between the neutral state and the Great Powers during the war. The double game played by Belgium throughout the war over a possible alliance with either Britain or France went some way to determining how Belgium would be treated at the post-war peace conference. The *Direction Politique* predicted that Belgium would be severely judged by the allies after the war, and that any insistence on an independent approach to its future could be viewed as an attempt to speak from both sides of its mouth. Baron Eugène Beyens, 'Deux Politiques', in *Le Flambeau*, 30 April 1922, 411–412; Rune Johansson, *Small State in Boundary Conflict: Belgium and the Belgian-German Border 1914–1919* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988), 54–59.

¹⁷As Manfred J. Enssle points out, although neither Germany nor Belgium were directly represented on the commission, nevertheless, its chairman, André Tardieu, was far from impartial in advocating Belgian demands. Manfred J. Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism: Germany, Belgium and the Eupen-Malmédy Question 1919–1929* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980), 20–22; André Tardieu, *The Truth About the Treaty* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1921), 217.

¹⁸AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Paul Hymans, Memo, 16 April 1919; Direction Politique, Memo, 15 September 1914.

¹⁹APR, Archives du Cabinet du Roi, 969, Compte-rendu de l'audition de Monsieur Hymans, 11 February; Van Zuylen, *Les mains libres*, 29–30; Marks, *Innocent Abroad*, 146–148; Roger Collinet, *L'annexion d'Eupen et Malmédy à la Belgique en 1920* (Verviers: Librairie La Dérive, 1986), 16–19.

A.J. Balfour, on the role of the British occupying forces in Malmédy, Hymans remained vague as to what constituted the Walloon cantons by simply referring to them as ‘Malmédy, [sic] St. Vith etc.’²⁰ Indeed, Hymans had previously stated that apart from looking for a resolution to its international position Belgium would furthermore look to ‘re-establish the Belgium of 1830’. This he added was no mere crusade of annexation but ‘a correction of the historical situation’.²¹ However, neither Eupen nor Malmédy had formed part of the nascent Belgian State in 1830.

In February, Paul Hymans finally informed the Council of Four of Belgium’s desire to annex what he simply referred to as the *cantons wallons* (the Walloon cantons), specifically Malmédy and Moresnet.²² The Belgian delegation eagerly sought further endorsements from local leaders that would serve to enhance their claim to Malmédy and to Moresnet.²³ In February, shortly after Hymans had addressed the Council of Four, a welcome piece of correspondence presented Belgium’s claim in just the correct light. It came from one of the leading members of the Walloon community in Malmédy, Henri Bragard. Bragard was one of the founding members of the *Club Wallon*, established in 1898 with the aim of protecting and promoting Walloon literary culture. However, its spiritual conception had taken place a year earlier following a speech made to the *fraternité* of Malmédy by Bragard’s uncle, the abbot of Sourbrodt, Nicolas Pietkin.²⁴ The *Club Wallon* started out as a literary and cultural organization but it had since become a facilitator for pro-Belgian agitation.

Bragard could barely control his delight on hearing of the definitive moves by the Belgian delegation to ‘reattach’ Malmédy to the *mère patrie*: ‘I cannot say what joy I feel in reading this news. You who know

²⁰The National Archives (TNA), Belgium, FO/608/125/020, Paul Hymans to A.J. Balfour, 10 February 1919.

²¹AGR, Jaspar Papers, T/031/02472/199, Paul Hymans to Lord Crowe, 17 June 1915.

²²Writing in 1921 in his account of the treaty negotiations, André Tardieu, who was chairman of the Commission on Danish and Belgian Affairs, spoke of ‘the two Walloon districts’ in reference to Eupen-Malmédy. Tardieu, *The Truth About the Treaty*, 222; Enssle, *Stresemann’s Territorial Revisionism*, 20.

²³Sally Marks, *Innocent Abroad*, 144–145.

²⁴Nicolas Pietkin, *La germanisation de la Wallonie prussienne* (Bruxelles: Société belge de Librairie, 1904), 103–106.

it, you who know my aspirations. Here is the final certitude of the coming deliverance.' Although 'drunk with joy' with the news that Malmedy would most certainly be incorporated into the Kingdom of Belgium, Bragard and his cohorts did not lose sight of the wider interests of their '*petite patrie*'. In a letter to the Foreign Ministry, Bragard pointed out how Malmedy's commercial lifeline ran towards the east of the cantons and to Germany. If Malmedy were to be singularly extirpated from its immediate economic milieu this, he argued, would prove detrimental to the town and to its economy. However, if Belgium were to seek a territorial '*désannexion*' on a much grander scale, spanning territories to which (according to Bragard) she had an equally valid historical claim, this would be beneficial not only to Malmedy but to the whole of Belgium.²⁵ It seemed that the ecstasy of deliverance was somewhat diluted by the sobering socio-political implications of the annexation.

Business leaders in both Eupen and Malmedy were at the same time worried as to the effect any sudden or arbitrary partitioning of the territory would have on their economic ties with Aachen. A few days prior to Bragard's letter to the Foreign Ministry, the charismatic Pierre Nothomb forwarded a petition from industry chiefs in Malmedy. Nothomb had worked closely with the Belgian government as a propagandist at Sainte Adresse near the city of Le Havre, to where the government had fled in 1914 following the German invasion.²⁶ The petition had been sent to Nothomb by the *bourgmestre* of Stavelot, a neighbouring town in 'old Belgium', which together with Malmedy had formed an independent principality up to the French Revolution.²⁷ Whilst it had by now become clear that the former German *Kreis* of Malmedy was likely to be annexed as part of the final settlement in Paris, the future of Eupen remained somewhat less certain. Apart from historic ties, there were the

²⁵AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Henri Bragard, President of the Club Wallon to the Belgian Foreign Ministry, 10 March 1919.

²⁶Pierre Nothomb, 'La déclaration de Sainte Adresse (14 février 1916): ses origines et ses conséquences,' *Le Flambeau* (31 January) 1922, 10–36; Marks, *Innocent Abroad*, 139 & 146–147; Henri Grégoire, Le problème de la Meuse, *Revue Générale*, CXXXVII (March 1937), 346–368.

²⁷AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Pierre Nothomb, to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 1 March 1919; Petition from industrialists in Malmedy to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 24 February 1919; Pierre Nothomb to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 3 March 1919.

present-day economic considerations to think about also. The director of *La Société de la Vieille Montagne*, a mining company which operated in the region, addressed such a question to Foreign Minister Hymans in February²⁸:

We have read in the papers that Minister Hymans, Belgian delegate to the Paris Peace Conference has demanded for Belgium the cantons of Malmedy and Montjoie [Monschau] as well as the territory of Neutral-Moresnet. He has however made no mention of the canton of Eupen. Maybe the press has not reproduced *in extenso* the demands of the Government.²⁹

Alongside the jagged-edged sword of post-war retribution, the Belgian authorities needed to carefully apply the scalpel of pragmatic and sober reasoning. This realistic approach was best summed up in the view expressed by a number of visiting Belgian parliamentarians to Malmedy in June 1919, when they concluded that in terms of the annexation, the general rule of thumb should be ‘the minimum of Germans with the maximum of forest’.³⁰ However, another key determining factor that lay behind Belgium’s eventual inclusion of Eupen in its post-war demands was the prevalent fear for the future security of the state and the minimization of a repeat invasion by Germany in the future. The Count de Limbourg gave this rather prophetic reading of events to Belgium’s foreign minister in March 1919:

Is it possible that we again will risk seeing the enemy attack from the first day of war from the position of the Meuse. France demands four days of resistance by Belgium to enable her mobilisation...We cannot therefore

²⁸AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Délégation belge, 30/XIV/1, Administrateur, Société Anonyme des Mines et Fonderies de Zinc de la Vieille Montagne to Paul Hymans, 21 February 1919.

²⁹AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Délégation belge, 30/XIV/1, M. Timmerhaus, Directeur Général de la Société Anonyme des Mines et Fonderies de Zinc de la Vieille Montagne (SVM), 17 February 1919.

³⁰AAEB, Classement B, D/331/10, Note remise par Puisset, Impériali and Jules Destrée à la Commission des Affaires Extérieures à-propos de Malmédy. Contained in correspondence to Baron Moncheur, June 1919; Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 250–263.

leave anything to chance and therefore must remove the immediate danger on the banks of the Meuse by pushing our borders eastward.³¹

Writing to Belgium's King Albert I, Bragard together with the secretary of the *Club Wallon*, Abbé Joseph Bastin, expressed their 'delight and gratitude for the warm welcome given to their demand for "de-annexation" from Germany.' However, the letter also urged that efforts be put in train to seek the release of some one hundred or so Walloon prisoners of war (POWs), who were still being held in Germany.³² It is interesting to note how Bragard's representations focus solely on the fate of Walloon POWs from Malmedy and never make mention of their ethnic German co-combatants, including those from Eupen. Shortly afterwards, some members of the *Club Wallon* penned a letter to President Woodrow Wilson seeking support for their desire to 'return to Belgium'. Before outlining their argument, the authors exclaimed their bemusement that '[U]ntil the middle of January our *neighbours* in Belgium were rather hostile to the absorption of our country by theirs' [author's emphasis].³³ Another annexationist movement, the *Malmédiens Réunis* based in Brussels, wrote energetically to the prime minister of the joy felt in stating that 'once again the inhabitants of Malmedy had not forgotten the primordial links such as language, music, and traditions, that tied them to Belgium'.³⁴ The Walloon lobby in Liège furthermore called on the foreign ministry to consider sending Belgian troops to Malmedy, as part of the allied occupation, '[T]aking care to choose units containing soldiers of the Walloon race. Then the thousands of loyal Walloons who await us and who call to us will be able to open their hearts and openly display the sentiments which they no doubt have held over such a long time.'³⁵

However, Bragard and his Walloon brothers were not alone in petitioning the American president. Their ethnic-German counterparts

³¹AAEB, Classement B, D/331/10, Compte de Limbourg to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 26 March 1919.

³²AAEB, Classement B, D/331/136, Henri Bragard, Président du Club Wallon to King Albert I, 20 February 1919.

³³AAEB, Classement B, D/331/112, Henri Bragard & Abbé Joseph Bastin to President Woodrow Wilson, March 1919.

³⁴AAEB, Classement B, D/331/868, Blaise to de Broqueville, 28 January 1919.

³⁵AAEB, Classement B, D/331/868, Blaise to de Broqueville, 28 January 1919.

were equally eager to have their voices heard. A petition originating from a group purporting to speak for the *preußischen wallonischen Gemeinschaft* (Prussian Walloon community) stated that, '[t]hroughout their long union with the German *patrie*, each time the latter made a call to their fidelity and valour, the Prussian Walloons defended their country shoulder to shoulder with their racial brothers [*frères de race*]; the Germans'.³⁶ As with Bragard's correspondence, the *preußischen wallonischen Gemeinschaft* pointed to the undeniable historical ties which they had forged with Prussia.³⁷

Bragard accused its authors of ignoring that 'Wallonie malmédienne' had once formed part of the principality of Stavelot-Malmedy up to the end of the *Ancien Régime*, and that furthermore the authors had co-founded the Holy Roman Empire of Germany with the present German nation. Nevertheless, the Prussian defenders continued, 'Never had we ever taken away the possibility for Wallonia to cultivate its individuality.' In this instance, however, there was no room for ambiguity. The effect of the *Kulturkampf* felt particularly from the late 1880s in Malmedy would eventually lead to a prohibition on the use of French as a vehicular language in the schools of Malmedy and its eventual suppression as a means of communication in the public sphere. The teaching of French in school would, from then on, be delivered on a par with that of English, as a foreign language,³⁸ stating that 'one could be a good Walloon, faithful to one's race whilst still being a millionaire and benefiting from the war begun by Prussia'.³⁹

Allegations made by the German side charged that certain vested interests within the separatist movement (described as 'beneficiaries of

³⁶AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Petition to US President Wilson on behalf of the Prussian Walloon Community, Malmedy, 1 February 1919.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Klaus Pabst, 'Die preußischen Wallonen – eine staatsreue Minderheit im Westen' in H.H. Hahn & P. Kunze (eds.), *Nationale Minderheiten und staatliche Minderheitenpolitik in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 71–79; Pietkin, *La Germanisation de la Wallonie prussienne*, 5; Elisée Le Gros, 'La wallonnie Malmédienne sous le régime prussien' *Le Pays de Saint Remacle*, xiii (Malmedy, 1977), 15–22.

³⁹AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Henri Bragard & Abbé Joseph Bastin to President Woodrow Wilson, March 1919.

the war') 'for many years had made great profits whilst the mass of the population had to tighten their belts and suffered thousands of privations'. Bragard retorted that because of the fragile state of affairs pertaining in the two districts after the war, the inhabitants were confused as to which way to turn. Since its annexation to Prussia in 1815, there had been little indication that the Walloon minority in Malmédy was keen to cede from their German brethren.⁴⁰ However, with the establishment of the modern German state and the onset of the *Kulturkampf* that followed, the level of mutual respect that had existed between subject and master was very quickly eroded, albeit not entirely obliterated. Indeed, the vast majority of the Walloon population remained openly loyal to the German state up to the outbreak of the First World War.⁴¹ Although the *Kulturkampf* inevitably dented that allegiance somewhat, those Walloons who fought for Germany in the Great War did so for the most part out of a sense of duty and loyalty. Now, having lost the war and lurching on the brink of implosion, Germany seemed to many the last place in which a secure future could be envisaged. Leaving aside the fact that the country would be severely dealt with when it came to paying for the war, the very real threat posed by communist revolutionaries, such as the Spartacists, augured badly for future stability.⁴²

During the autumn school break in 1918 in Malmédy, all the teachers in the *Kreis* were called together expecting to be briefed on the latest news emanating from the Front. This was just one of the many propaganda initiatives routinely organized to accommodate the war effort. As one of the teachers prepared to address those assembled, the local administrator of the *Kreis*, *Landrat* von Korff, shuffled reluctantly towards the top of the room. Looking somewhat dejected, he gazed sullenly at his audience for a few seconds before communicating his defeatist message.

When we started out to war in August 1914 we dreamed of a victory beyond parallel. After more than four years we have marched from victory to victory and awaited the final triumph at the cost of the greatest

⁴⁰Lucien Colson, *Malmédy et les territoires rétrocédés* (Liège: Joseph Olivier, 1920), 24.

⁴¹Joseph Bastin, 'Malmédy pendant et après la guerre', *Annuaire de la Société de la littérature Wallonne* (1920), 382–383.

⁴²William Carr, *A History of Germany, 1815–1990* (4th ed.) (New York & London: Bloomsbury, 1991), 236–248.

sacrifices. With me, you expected that the day would finally come when all our enemies would be at our feet. Alas, it did not happen.⁴³

Von Korff had been *Landrat* of Malmedy since 1907, a post he would hold until 1920, at which time his position would become obsolete following the establishment of a transitory government charged with the assimilation of both districts into the Belgian state. Prior to the war, he was described by none other than the Walloon activist, Henri Bragard, as ‘a swarthy and pure Mediterranean type’, who was ‘extremely sociable, a happy accomplice and a *bon vivant*’. But the war was to change everything.⁴⁴

For the Walloon community in particular, as the conflict intensified, von Korff further tightened the screw of Germanization. Children born after 1915 now had to be given a German name, and shops and merchant premises had to display their names and goods in German only. He also insisted that all road signs written in the French language be removed or painted over to display the German version alone. On further examination, one might consider such a measure rather pragmatic during wartime, in terms of protecting the borderland district from being mistaken for Belgian territory by advancing German units. Indeed, such instances did occur. Shortly after the invasion of Belgium in August 1914, a German soldier was overheard explaining how, when passing through the village of Sourbrodt, a good deal of force had to be used against civilians. He was shocked when told that Sourbrodt was in fact a German village. The town of Lingeuville on the banks of the Amblève was also mistaken for Belgian territory and many of the houses torched. Only the hoisting of the German imperial flag on the customs post between Belgium and Germany ensured a halt to the onslaught.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the treatment of local inhabitants at the hands of the authorities in both districts during the war would have done little to kindle their allegiance. Berlin had imposed a callous system of requisitioning, whereby cattle were forcibly sequestered for the benefit of the greater German population. Dairy farmers had to give up to a third of

⁴³ *La Warche*, 21 June 1919.

⁴⁴ Pierre Moxhet, ‘*Le palais du gouvernement de la Landratur au centre des finances*’, *Malmedy Folklore*, 60 (2003–2005), 283–296.

⁴⁵ Gustave Somville, *The Road to Liège; The Path of Crime, August 1914* (Henry Carton de Wiart, pref.) (Bernard Miall, trans.) (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916), 15.

their produce to the war effort. This practice continued even after the war, when the region fell under allied occupation.⁴⁶ Once the tide of war began to turn against Germany however, numerous voices of discontent emerged in and around Malmédy in particular. The desire among a growing number of Walloons to seek Belgian nationality was evident as the war entered its final stages. One young man from the town, awaiting his conscription into the German army, wrote a letter to both the king of Belgium and to the Belgian prime minister asking them 'to allow me the opportunity to prove the extent of my desire and my right to be counted among the numbers of other Belgians. Even if it means sacrificing my life'.⁴⁷ To what extent such pleas were a timely acknowledgement of the changing tide of the war is a moot point. Some 5,656 Malmédians fought in the First World War, which equated to 15.6% of the district population. Many young boys were catapulted from the schoolroom and the farm to the trenches of Sedan, Trier and even as far as the Eastern Front, among whom were many Walloons. Of that number, 1,082 died in battle, while a further 564 returned severely mutilated. The people of Eupen equally paid a high price for going to war. Out of the 4,043 men who fought valiantly for the cause of the *Vaterland* from that *Kreis* (almost 15% of the population), 718 fell on the field of battle.⁴⁸ A further 327 returned home physically and psychologically scarred. As the peace negotiations continued in Paris, thousands more ex-combatants from both districts languished in prisoner-of-war camps.⁴⁹

By April, Belgian troops had taken over from their French counterparts in Eupen. According to Belgian press reports, they were 'well

⁴⁶AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Contrôleur Administratif du cercle d'Eupen to Contrôleur Administratif en Chef de la Régence d'Aix la Chapelle, attached to correspondence from Belgian War Ministry to Paul Hymans, 23 April 1919, 2; Heinz Doepgen, *Die Abtretung des Gebietes Eupen-Malmédy an Belgien im Jahr 1920* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1966), 90–92.

⁴⁷AAEB, Classement B, D/331/287, René & Berthe Beckman Steinbach to His Majesty King Albert I, 4 April 1917; René Beckman to Monsieur le Ministre de la Guerre, 4 April 1917.

⁴⁸Rapport sur l'activité, i., 148.

⁴⁹Ibid., 148; Christoph Brüll, 'Eupen-Malmédy 1918–1945: le temps des déchirures', in Roland Blaise, *Hommage à Henri Bragard (1877–1944)*, Liège: Société de Langue et Littérature wallonnes, 2009), 7–39 (16).

received by the population'.⁵⁰ However, German observers told a very different story, charging that '[a]t the very moment when Germany is offering its counter propositions, Belgian troops are occupying German territory. Of course nobody has asked the population if it pleases them to become Belgian.'⁵¹ Such stirrings of imminent change worried the incumbent *Landrat* for Eupen, von Kessler, who began to view the annexation of both Eupen and Malmédy to Belgium as inevitable. However, some visiting German observers were of the opinion that the apparent 'hopelessness' portrayed by von Kessler was somewhat overstated. Members of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei* (SDP) were actively campaigning in Malmédy in spite of the threat of expulsion. In one incident, a local member of the party who had been expelled for propagandizing was brought back over the border by British soldiers who, according to a German report, 'were themselves socialists'.⁵² In another show of support for Germany, in Eupen a list containing some 3,902 signatures, out of an eligible electorate of 8,097, declaring loyalty to Germany was said to have been collected in just 24 hours. Not all of the population could be reached in such a limited time period. It seemed clear from such evidence that some 90% of eligible voters would declare in favour of Germany when the time came.⁵³

Yet nothing was to be left to chance. The *Zentrum Partei* (German Centre Party) was the most vociferous agitator against the annexation to Belgium. Its local activists, such as the pastor Männiken and the director of the *Lyceum* in Eupen, Dr Pottgiesser, wrote to Archbishop von Hartmann in Cologne warning of the danger that a lukewarm attitude by the German clergy would pose to Eupen's case.⁵⁴ Hartmann was an unapologetic imperialist and a favourite of the Kaiser. He echoed the German delegation's contention that instead of territorial annexation

⁵⁰ *La Nation Belge*, 28 May 1919.

⁵¹ *Berliner-Tageblatt*, 28 May 1919.

⁵² Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB), R904/466/23, 'Besuch in Aachen', 18 June 1919.

⁵³ BAB, R904/740/1481/VIII/26011, Hermann Mennicken, Chairman of the *Zentrum Partei* in Eupen, and Arthur Peters, Chairman of the Eupen branch of the German People's Party to Waffenstillstandskommission, Eupen, 19 March 1919, Abschrift, 10 June 1919.

⁵⁴ BAB, R904/740/A16204, Abschrift [no date].

'[o]ne could remedy the situation by an agreement to deliver wood to Belgium'.⁵⁵

In March, von Korff organized a petition of 2,000 signatures from pro-German Walloons in Malmedy demanding that the district stay within Germany. Of the 7,000 or so Prussian Walloons in the *Kreis* of Malmedy, 4,000 were eligible to vote; therefore, this was a significant number by any standard. The petition came in the form of numerous envelopes, each containing a list of signatures. Other resolutions from German inhabitants declaring in favour of Germany were also handed into the office of the headquarters of the British military administration in Malmedy. In total, these amounted to some 7,133 signatures. Von Korff claimed that a further 1,200 signatures had been sent to the German Finance Minister Erzberger two weeks previously, thus putting the total number in favour of staying in Germany at 8,333. According to von Korff, many more Walloons were afraid to put their names to a petition for fear of reprisals in the event of Belgian annexation.⁵⁶ Be that as it may, a growing body of support in favour of Belgian annexation was believed to exist among the larger industrialists and businessmen.

Many had enriched themselves to a considerable degree during the war but now faced a very uncertain future if they were to remain under German sovereignty. Inside post-war Germany, the prospect of significant tax increases loomed large as the country sought to meet its war debts and reparations. Opportunists such as Hubert Lang however, saw little problem with changing their allegiance. Lang, who operated a very successful tanning business in Malmedy, remained flexible as to which horse he would back as the future of Eupen-Malmedy hung in the balance. During the war, the millionaire businessman openly sported a Prussian army uniform while driving from village to village requisitioning hides. On the return of defeated German combatants to Malmedy, Lang greeted them with a placard that read 'Glory to our unbeaten heroes'. However, once the occupying British army took possession of the town, Lang arranged for them to be honoured with a similar placard, replacing

⁵⁵AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Proclamation du Cardinal Archevêque von Hartmann, archevêque de Cologne, Malmedy 1919.

⁵⁶TNA, FO/608, British Delegation, 5/1/4352, Landrat Freiherr von Korff to Brigadier General Hyslop [translation], 9 March 1919; TNA, British Delegation, FO/608/5/1/V, Auszug aus dem Protokollbuche, Bürgermeisterei Büllingen, 7 March 1919; Pabst, 'Eupen-Malmedy', 250–263; Cremer & Mießén, *Spuren*, 8.

the words ‘unbeaten heroes’ with ‘glorious allies’. Once the two districts had fallen under Belgian sovereignty, Lang was duly decorated with the order of Leopold II for his trouble, and even more importantly for him, he was allowed to postpone payment of his tax liability. Conversely, his workers and the working population of Eupen-Malmedy would not be treated with the same level of deference.⁵⁷ As the pro-German camp saw it, industrialists such as wished at all costs to avoid having to contribute to the cost of reparations soon to be imposed on Germany. It was clear to them that it was only the fear of financial disadvantage that saw these ‘infidels’ rush to ‘divest themselves of the charges of war’.⁵⁸ In order to ensure that their future investments remained secure, employers impressed upon their employees and their families to consider carefully their future sovereign status. Although an *arrêté* had been introduced prohibiting the forceful coercion of employees to make written submissions of their opinions on whether or not the cantons should return to Germany, it is difficult to ascertain how well the *arrêté* was actually enforced. This responsibility fell to the British Army of Occupation in Malmedy, which soon found itself caught in the middle of a propaganda war being waged from either side of the territory for the hearts and minds of the population.

‘UPHOLDING THE STATUS QUO’: THE BRITISH OCCUPATION OF MALMEDY

From a Belgian perspective, the role being played by the British army of occupation in Malmedy was far from neutral. Information received by the censor’s office in the fourth zone of occupation pointed to a ‘Belgophobe campaign’ being led by ‘the English (Scottish troops) [sic] in Malmédy’ [sic]. According to local pro-Belgian sources, the British occupying forces had ‘coldly declared that they will not leave the *cercle* in a hurry’ and that Eupen-Malmedy would return to Germany ‘whatever

⁵⁷Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen Düsseldorf (LANRW), Regierung Aachen-Prasidialbüro und Sondergruppen, Eupen-Malmedy, 1653/6823/12 [microfilm], Henri d’Amblève, ‘Dans les territoires d’Eupen et de Malmédy’, iii, *Le Neptune*, 7 December 1921.

⁵⁸AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Petition to Wilson on behalf of the Prussian Walloon Community.

the results of the plebiscite'.⁵⁹ In reality, the British Brigadier General Hyslop, who headed the military mission in Malmedy, attempted to walk a thin line between the rival expectations of two distinct ethnic groups, while trying to remain impartial to both. This did not prevent pro-Belgian activists from attempting to spread their message among the population. However, such acts were interpreted by Hyslop as having the potential to incite a backlash from the majority ethnic German community. In January, he summoned the Walloon activist Henri Bragard to his headquarters, insisting, 'I do not wish that the peace and quiet of the town be sacrificed by your agitation. If I hear the least thing again I will have you put into prison.'⁶⁰ Bragard was furious over what he saw as the ignorance of the British authorities to the political realities of the day, and their tendency to overlook the counter-propaganda being waged by the other side. 'Voilà! So much for our protection', he wrote to a friend.⁶¹

Following Bragard's dressing down, a veritable inundation of complaints was received by the Armistice Commission meeting at Spa. In spite of this, Hyslop continued to enjoy the fulsome support of his superiors. The GQG made it clear that Malmedy was still German territory and that all of the people, whatever their ethnic origin, were still German citizens, unless decided otherwise. It was therefore the local German administration that continued to be charged with administering the territory under the surveillance and the protection of the army of occupation. The GQG furthermore railed against what they saw as the lies and unjustified attacks, intended to sully the character of General Hyslop, 'a gallant man, very serious and who has much sympathy for Belgium and for her aspirations'.⁶² Be that as it may, Hyslop asked to see Bragard again and offered him a fulsome apology, exclaiming that Bragard must have misunderstood him. In a note to Foreign Minister Paul Hymans from the British ambassador to Belgium, F.H. Villiers, makes clear that

⁵⁹AAEB, 10.792/I/1982, Eupen-Malmedy, Carl Peters, Service de la Censure, Armée d'Occupation belge (AOB), 4^e zone des Pays Rhénans, État-Major to 2^e Bureau du QG/AOB, 15 July 1919.

⁶⁰AAEB, Classement B, D/331/868, Henri Bragard to Monsieur Lamberty, 1 February 1919.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²AAEB, Classement B, D/331, GQG of British Army to General Ort Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 15 March 1919.

perhaps a personal falling out may have been at the root of some of the complaints levelled against General Hyslop. Villiers noted how Henri Bragard had been employed by Hyslop as a translator but was ‘replaced for not giving satisfaction’. Since then he had been ‘stirring up trouble in connection with the friction existing between various parties in Malmedy’.⁶³

Since arriving in Malmedy, General Hyslop had occupied a section of the *Landrat*’s residence. This arrangement gave rise to rumours that he was soft on the Germans and had allowed them to reassert their dominance in Malmedy. But Hyslop was adamant that since Malmedy was still officially part of the German state, his role as head of the British mission there was to work within the laws of that state as far as was practicable. This meant upholding the status quo, which also involved the prevention of acts of vandalism and sabotage against German paraphernalia and a prohibition on the spreading of pro-Belgian propaganda.⁶⁴

Hyslop informed the director of military intelligence in the British delegation of numerous situations where the threat of economic boycott hung over those who dared not declare in favour of an annexation to Belgium when the time came. These threats, it was alleged, were being carried out with the knowledge and tacit support of the Belgian authorities.⁶⁵ Apart from such threats, a steady stream of Belgian and French newspapers was covertly being disseminated across the territory. On one occasion, a paperboy travelling to Malmedy from Aachen carrying French newspapers was intercepted by a local police official, who shouted, ‘Dirty little pig coming to bring trouble with your newspapers.’ The excuse given for detaining the youngster was that the newspapers had not passed the censorship of the English authorities. The culprit was duly arrested and brought to Hyslop’s office for questioning. However, on this occasion the brigadier general had gone hunting with von Korff,

⁶³AAEB, Classement B, D/331, F.H. Villiers, British Legation, Brussels to Paul Hymans, 4 March 1919; TNA, FO/608, British Delegation, 5/1/4084, General Officer Commanding Second Army to GHQ, 28 February 1919.

⁶⁴Marks, *Innocent Abroad*, 155–158; TNA FO/608, British Delegation, 125/12/491–3, Paul Hymans to A.J. Balfour, 10 February 1919.

⁶⁵TNA, FO/608, British Delegation, 5/1/4352, Brigadier General H.H.G. Hyslop to Director of Military Intelligence, Military Section, British Delegation, 10 March 1919.

and the young man was ordered to return immediately across the border to Belgium.⁶⁶

No Belgian flags were allowed to fly in the town, and permission to cross into the greater part of Belgium had to be requested from the German authorities, something which was almost always refused. For the Walloon population of Malmedy, their emotions swung between impatience and disappointment, not only with the British authorities, but with the Belgian Government in Brussels also. Its apparent inertia in response to the unfolding situation, and what was perceived as its indifference to the fate of the population, disappointed many of those willing to put their trust in Belgium.⁶⁷ This was a symptom which would continue to mark the relationship between the pro-Belgian inhabitants of the cantons and Brussels for many years to come.

However, elements loyal to Germany were equally eager to promote their interests. In spite of the Kaiser's abdication the previous November, von Korff arranged for an elaborate celebration marking the Kaiser's birthday on 27 January 1919. The event was honoured with a mass at which the children of the town were dressed in their Sunday clothes. Such a display disillusioned many pro-Belgians, who now began to worry whether they would ever be rid of their German overlords. At this stage, it seemed certain that Malmedy at least was going to be conditionally ceded to Belgium, subject to some form of popular consultation. Some pro-Belgian activists found a more direct route to General Hyslop's door, however.

Léon Goffart, a director of the Steinbach paper mill, paid a visit to Hyslop as part of a five-day sojourn in Malmedy. The Steinbach mill was the largest single employer in Malmedy, with a work force of over 400. Goffart presented the brigadier general with a letter from the Belgian war ministry with recommendations for the British military authorities. That Steinbach was entrusted with such correspondence speaks volumes of the close links between economic and political elites at this sensitive stage. Hyslop extended a warm welcome to Goffart, who informed the general of the more practical aspects of his visit and later the two men engaged in conversation over various political and social matters

⁶⁶ BAB, R904/740, Landrat von Korff to Regierungspräsident Aachen, 22 February 1919.

⁶⁷ AAEB, Correspondance Politique, Légations (1914–1926), GB/1919/II, Albert Bassompierre to Sir Francis Villiers, 20 February 1919.

concerning the Eupen-Malmedy region. Goffart reiterated his previous threat, issued to the Belgian Government, that the Steinbach paper mill, established in 1776, would close its doors if Malmedy were not 'returned' to Belgium.⁶⁸

He then broached the subject of the prohibition on Belgian newspapers by the British authorities. Hyslop made it clear that the weekly publication *l'Annonce* published in the nearby Belgian town of Stavelot had been banned due to the incessant personal nature of attacks on members of the German and British authorities contained in its reports. The paper attempted to get around the ban by introducing a supplement: *Le Potin*, literally translated as 'the gossip'. This raised the ire of the *Landrat*.⁶⁹ Hyslop also defended his decision to ban the sale of newspapers in the street as this only led to scuffles between pro and anti-Belgian factions. Not wishing to seem unreasonable however, Hyslop agreed to Goffart's request to arrange for twenty-five copies of *La Meuse*, *Le Journal de Liège*, *La Gazette de Liège*, *L'Express*, *L'Excelsior*, *Le Soir* and *La Nation Belge* to be delivered daily to Malmedy via Aachen, as well as fifty copies of *The Daily Mail* for the British soldiers stationed in Malmedy. The newspapers were to be sold from one location only, at the local shop run by Madame Lemoine, to avoid any unnecessary friction. A further condition was that the shop would receive 'special protection' from the British authorities.⁷⁰

Goffart then suggested to the General that he intended to hoist a Belgian flag over the premises of the Steinbach paper mill. Hyslop refused the request initially, citing that such a display would only encourage the very unruly and seditious behaviour that he had been trying to stamp out. However, Goffart insisted that he wished to make it publicly known that his premises dated back to long before the annexation of Malmedy to Prussia. Of course, Goffart would have been aware that by the same token the premises had never operated within the contours of the

⁶⁸TNA, FO/608/5/1/4084/13, British Delegation, Note sur La Société Steinbach et Cie. de Malmedy, 18 February 1919.

⁶⁹BAB, R904/740, Landrat von Korff to Regierungspräsident, 22 February 1919.

⁷⁰AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Pierre Van Werveke, Secrétaire Général, Le Gouvernement d'Eupen-Malmedy, Note sur le résultat du voyage de Mr. Goffart-Steinbach à Malmedy, 1 March 1919.

Belgian state. Hyslop relented but insisted that his priority was the maintenance of public order in the town.⁷¹

Following their meeting, Goffart arrived at the paper mill to address his workers. His comments on the '*désannexion*' of the two districts were received with rapturous applause. Within minutes, he arranged for the Belgian tricolour to be hoisted over the premises. No sooner had the life-size Belgian flag begun to flutter in the breeze, than a group of protesters gathered outside. A shower of stones and random missiles was thrown, and shouts of 'Death to Goffart' rang out in the street. Goffart decided not to risk the security of the premises and the safety of his employees, and made an urgent phone call to Hyslop's office. Within a short time, fifty soldiers arrived to disperse the crowd, bringing a rattled Goffart to safety.

Later during his visit to Malmedy, Goffart also met with the local council and urged them to declare in favour of the 'return' of the two districts to Belgium. He asked that the councillors sign a petition, which was to be sent to the Foreign Ministry. Ten councillors signed the petition while another five refused. The reason given by three of the dissenters was that they were originally from the outer Rhine region of Germany. One however, came from the town but had three sons married in Germany. The fifth was the local hotelier, Dexter, who insisted that he did not wish to become embroiled in such matters and hence abstained.⁷²

The legitimacy of the petition was queried by von Korff, who wrote to General Hyslop on the matter. According to von Korff, the ten signatories were either directly or indirectly connected to the Steinbach paper mill. He pointed out how one of the signatories was the wife of Louis Steisel, a shareholder in the Steinbach company. Another signature belonged to the wife of Hubert Lang, who organized the petition. The Walloon activist, Henri Bragard, who for some years had been secretary of the Steinbach factory, had also attached his signature.⁷³ A separate

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Pierre Van Werveke, Note sur le résultat du voyage de Mr. Goffart-Steinbach à Malmedy, 1 March 1919.

⁷³TNA, British Delegation FO/608, 5/46, Landrat von Korff to General Hyslop (translation of pro-Belgian petition), 6 March 1919.

petition signed by industrialists in Malmedy was also sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷⁴

Goffart returned from Malmedy somewhat pleased with his achievements. He believed that Bragard and Bastin had misunderstood Hyslop, whom he saw as a man who wanted to avert trouble at all costs, but who knew how to deal with it also. Contrary to rumour, Hyslop did not share the same accommodation as the *Landrat*, instead occupying separate apartments designated for use by the German civil authorities. It was equally false to suggest that the general enjoyed a close relationship with the *Landrat*. As far as Goffart could see, the general was very well disposed towards Belgium and to its legitimate aspirations.⁷⁵

The local press in Malmedy seemed devoid of articles relating to Belgium. ‘Many of the people remain convinced that France had invaded Belgium before the declaration of war’ wrote an official at the war ministry. He followed in parenthesis with the comment that ‘[a] press campaign is ongoing to correct this error’.⁷⁶ Some of the communes had already begun to organize French classes; however, most of the population seemed more preoccupied with the transformations in their future economic and commercial relations with Germany. The industrial elites of the town worried over what was going to happen to their trade. They found it strange that they had not as yet been able to trade with Belgium. Some worried that they might be faced with the possibility of a boycott imposed on them by the allies. The British troops furthermore encountered blind hostility towards Britain. ‘The English continue to be held responsible for the war.’⁷⁷ Some locals complained of the penalties imposed by the British occupying authorities on men and women who contravened the rules. Men could be made to wash down automobiles whilst women were sent peeling potatoes.⁷⁸ Such punishments may have been demeaning, but they were hardly on a par with the brutality meted

⁷⁴AAEB, Classement B, D/331/2499, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères to Le conseil communal de Malmedy, 25 March 1919.

⁷⁵AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Pierre Van Werveke, Note sur le résultat du voyage de Mr. Goffart-Steinbach à Malmedy, 1 March 1919.

⁷⁶AAEB, Classement B, D/331/A/51/I3, Ministère de la Guerre to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 3ème rapport mensuel sur l’état d’esprit des populations de la 4ème zone d’occupation, 7 March 1919.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

out to the population of Belgium during the occupation. Indeed, the majority of the population appeared on the whole to be satisfied with the guarantees of public order that the British occupation had delivered. In May, the Belgian government appointed the former *commissaire d'arrondissement* for Bastogne, Adolf Schnorrenberg, as civil administrator for Malmedy in anticipation of the eventual transfer of authority to Belgium. Until then, his authority would be eclipsed by Hyslop's office. A similar transition was also underway in Eupen.⁷⁹

THE SITUATION IN EUPEN

Whilst Malmedy remained under the putatively neutral control (at least in German eyes) of the British Army of Occupation, the imminent arrival of Belgian troops in Eupen and the omnipresence of the Belgian civil administrator, Léon Xhaflaire, augured badly for German interests.⁸⁰ Xhaflaire had been a notary in Verviers and was appointed to the post of civil administrator in Eupen in May 1919.⁸¹ Eupen fell within the French zone of occupation under the immediate command of Colonel Dumontet. Soon control would pass to Belgium's General Michel. In the meantime, however, Xhaflaire would make his presence felt. The French allowed the Belgian authorities more leeway in Eupen, relative to that granted by the British in Malmedy, and this greatly facilitated Xhaflaire in establishing his authority in the town.

Xhaflaire provided Brussels with regular updates on the situation in Eupen. As with von Korff in Malmedy, the *Landrat* for Eupen, von Kessler, would have to prepare for his departure to Germany once the treaty came into effect. However, many of von Kessler's subordinates quietly let it be known that if they could be guaranteed their jobs they would willingly support the annexation by Belgium.⁸² According to

⁷⁹ Collinet, *L'annexion d'Eupen et Malmedy à la Belgique en 1920*, 71.

⁸⁰ BAB, R 904/466/23–4, 'Besuch in Aachen: Rheinische Republik', 18 June 1919.

⁸¹ Doepgen, *Die Abtretung*, 100; Philippe Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland: Selbst und Fremdbilder bei Josef Ponten und Peter Schmitz, 1918–1940* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2013), 91.

⁸² AAEB, Classement B, D/331, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, Contrôleur Administratif (C.A.) du Cercle d'Eupen to C.A. en Chef de la Régence d'Aix la Chapelle, attached to correspondence from Ministère de la Défense to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23 April 1919.

Xhaflaire, a number of *Bürgermeisterin* had revealed to him how they looked forward to their people being treated more humanely. One cautioned, however, for the need to ‘show the people the advantages of being annexed to Belgium’.⁸³ Among the majority of postal and railway workers a certain indifference seemed in evidence. Yet if they too were assured of keeping their jobs, they would equally be willing to accept the annexation. Furthermore, whilst many young men from the locality had fallen in defence of the *Vaterland* during the war, many more still remained in captivity and thus, according to Xhaflaire, Belgium’s ability to ensure their safe return and fair treatment had the potential to greatly alter attitudes towards any new dispensation.⁸⁴ Xhaflaire also recommended that certain special measures be adopted to assist elderly German subjects, as well as war orphans and wounded war veterans. This he saw as essential for assuaging the fears of the inhabitants regarding mistreatment by the Belgian authorities.⁸⁵

In a report to the Foreign Ministry prepared in late spring of 1919, Xhaflaire made some far-reaching recommendations that he believed the Belgian state ought to apply if it were serious about consolidating its hold over these new territories. Firstly, in his view, Brussels ought to nominate a special commissioner for Eupen who, apart from administrative control, would liaise with the local administration in cultivating public opinion and make various alliances with influential actors. At all costs, he would have to prevent protestations against the annexation. He would no doubt need to have a good command of German as well as the patois of the area. Ideally, the police would also fall under his control. In fact, everything would begin and end with this ‘*commissaire spécial*’, barring control of the military. In addition, he urged that the Belgian government ensure that the rate of exchange be set at one franc to the

⁸³AAEB, 10.787/1/3, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, 23 April 1919.

⁸⁴Ibid., Agence d’Aix la Chapelle, attached to correspondence from Ministère de la Défense to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23 April 1919. AAEB, 10.787/1/3, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, 23 April 1919.

⁸⁵AAEB, 10.787/812, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, 8 May 1919, Annexe II to A.O. Direction du Contrôle Administratif to Chef d’État-Major, 12 May 1919.

mark, whilst giving the assurance that the same rate of tax as existed in the rest of Belgium would apply to the territory from January 1920.⁸⁶ These measures, he argued, would not cost a great deal and 'would only involve the expense of a few advertisements' but it was up to Brussels to get the message across. 'It would be profoundly regrettable', he wrote, 'if the sympathy which the Belgian nation found here among the majority of the inhabitants of the district [*cercle*] were to be undermined by inertia.' Xhaflaire was anxious that no time be lost. Xhaflaire may have overstated his popularity however.⁸⁷

Whilst many inhabitants may have demonstrated a certain willingness to swim with the changing tide, a majority of voices still seemed likely to favour remaining inside Prussia. Not least, since the development of Eupen's economy seemed symbiotic with that of Aachen. The almost 30,000 dairy cows being farmed in Eupen were vital to the milk supply of the main cities of the Rhineland. Forestry of more than 10,000 hectares and the abundant water resources around Eupen meant that the area was a natural source of invaluable materials essential to the development of industry in Aachen and throughout the Rhineland. Besides, Eupen itself was already well established as a textile centre and was now also an emerging location for cable-works and rubber manufacturing. The German market remained therefore a far more lucrative prospect when compared to that of Belgium.⁸⁸

That said, Xhaflaire had the impression that the bigger landowners showed themselves to be quite favourable to Belgium. For one reason, the rate of tax would not be as high and furthermore 'all of the aggravating measures' employed by the German authorities that served only to 'paralyze initiative' would disappear. 'It is fortunate', he wrote, 'that these influential men show themselves openly in favour of the annexation, and thus the farmer must equally turn towards Belgium.'⁸⁹ Conversely, most of the industrialists in Eupen as opposed to Malmedy were openly hostile to annexation by Belgium. The vast majority of their clientele being German, they recognized a double disadvantage

⁸⁶AAEB, 10.787/812, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, 8 May 1919, Annexe II to A.O. Direction du Contrôle Administratif to Chef d'État Major, 12 May 1919.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸BAB, R 904/466/26-7, Bemerkungen zu den Forderungen des Vorfrieden-Entwurfes betreffend die Abtretung des Kreises Eupen an Belgien, 19 May 1919.

⁸⁹AAEB, 10/787, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, 7 June 1919.

in the imposition of customs duties by both the Belgian and German authorities on future exports to Germany.⁹⁰

Hard economic realities played the most significant role in diluting patriotic sentiment. The chief concern voiced by most inhabitants was over restrictions that might be introduced concerning the exchange of marks for Belgian francs. 'If we are going to lose out,' noted one local to the administrative controller, 'we might as well stay German.' As far as one *Bürgermeister* was concerned, it was necessary to step outside the parameters of patriotic sentiment. 'After all', he commented, 'it was material advantage that was going to direct the future.' He told Xhaflaire how '[t]he people suffer from a lack of everything. The food-stuffs distributed by the *comité de ravitaillement* are insufficient and when the people have to procure foodstuff on the black market, they are obtained at exorbitant prices.' He continued, 'The *cercle* of Eupen has 27,000 inhabitants, give to each two kilograms of peas or beans with a kilogram of margarine each week and I assure you that everyone will be with you.' 'There you go', wrote Xhaflaire in a memo to the Belgian Chiefs of Staff, 'a string to pull, why not take advantage of it.'⁹¹

These however, were matters which Xhaflaire believed could be addressed through the application of a little tact and common sense. He advised some temporary measure where, for a period of about ten to fifteen years, industrialists who had been in business for two years or more would be able to procure their goods devoid of importation duties on raw materials and of exportation duties to Germany. While this commerce would mean a freedom of movement between Germany and Belgium, Xhaflaire discounted the fears raised by some industrialists who claimed that the market for their goods inside Belgium would be saturated by competition in a much smaller market. In fact, he saw the post-war period as one of great difficulty for many Belgian industrialists whose own businesses had suffered greatly as a consequence of the war. Only time would tell if his assessment was the correct one.⁹²

German observers on the ground in Eupen and Malmedy painted a somewhat different picture to that presented by Xhaflaire. It seemed

⁹⁰AAEB, 10/787, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, 7 June 1919.

⁹¹AAEB, 10/787/812, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, 3 May 1919, Annexe I to A.O. Direction du Contrôle Administratif, 12 May 1919.

⁹²AAEB, 10/787, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, 7 June 1919.

that, if anything, opinion among the vast majority of the population had not shifted in favour of Belgium. Indeed, 'strong currents' were said to exist even among Walloon workers against annexation to Belgium. Despite 'the sense of belonging to the [German] state since time immemorial', it would be economic factors that would play the most important role in determining the mindsets of the population. It appeared clear to the German officials that the industrial worker and small farmer alike shared the fear that their economic prospects would wither in Belgian hands. The agricultural sector would have to trade against Belgian farmers already well established in the Belgian market, while German markets would be closed to them.⁹³ What tends to emerge from such conflicting interpretations of the situation in both Eupen and Malmedy is the impression of a cautious and confused populace seeking desperately to make sense of developments that were unfolding over their heads. Not sure of which way to turn, most people seem to have employed a wait and see approach until at least the peace negotiations were concluded.

When Lieutenant General Michel, Commandant of the Belgian Army of Occupation in Eupen, entered the town on 1 June, he reviewed the troops of the first and second companies under the command of Major A.E.M. Bogaerts, who headed Belgium's military mission there. He then met with a group of representatives of the Franco-Belgian community of Aachen, who affirmed their loyalty to the *mère patrie*. Michel then paid a visit to the local council where he met with *Landrat* von Kessler and some of the *Bürgermeisterin*.

I said to these messieurs that after having been taken from Belgium more than a hundred years ago, the *cercle* of Eupen was finally returning to Belgium of which the name is synonymous with Liberty [sic] and of which the Constitution, born in the revolution of 1830 is cited as a model of liberty.⁹⁴

Before the month had passed, the Treaty of Versailles would ensure the conditional cession of Eupen-Malmedy, pending the holding of

⁹³BAB, R 904/466/23, Besuch in Aachen: Eupen und Malmedy, 18 June 1919.

⁹⁴AAEB, 10.792/1/46369, Eupen-Malmedy, Lieutenant Général Michel (1 June 1919) cited in memo from Ministère de la Guerre to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 14 June 1919.

a popular consultation or ‘public expression of opinion’ in which the inhabitants of both districts would have the opportunity to protest against the definitive annexation by Belgium. Albeit not yet ratified by Germany, the treaty’s signing increased the sense of urgency in the districts and impressed upon the people of Eupen-Malmedy the need to seriously consider their future.⁹⁵

PUBLIC OPINION IN ‘OLD’ AND ‘NEW BELGIUM’ POST-VERSAILLES

Apart from the Versailles Treaty, the Rhineland Agreement was also signed by the allies, which opened the way for an allied occupation of the Rhineland. The occupation covered the left bank of the Rhine, and stretched to a 30km radius on its right bank, incorporating the bridge-heads of Cologne, Koblenz and Mayence. The Rhineland Agreement also established the Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission (IARHC), which was a civilian body charged with monitoring relations between the military and civilians, and which dealt with economic and ancillary social matters. The Belgian zone or fourth zone of occupation accounted for just 10% of the entire occupied territory, stretching northwards from Eupen and including the neighbouring city of Aachen. Some 15,000 Belgian troops controlled the fourth zone under the command of General Michel.⁹⁶

Over the following months, a propaganda war raged from pulpit to pavement in the troubled territory. For some Belgian observers, the chances of acquiring Eupen-Malmedy, especially those parts inhabited mainly by ethnic Germans, seemed increasingly unlikely. Lieutenant General Coppejans of the Belgian army of occupation in the fourth zone reported how few truly envisaged a separation from the *Vaterland*. Although the people of Malmedy were indeed anxious for a change of regime, this was not surprising as the *cercle* was composed of villages where the Walloon population dominated. That said, Coppejans noted

⁹⁵ *The Versailles Treaty*, Article 34, iii.

⁹⁶ This had previously been known as the Luxembourg Economic Committee which attempted to balance the often-divergent interests of the allied powers in the Rhineland. TNA, FO/371/7521, French propaganda for separation of Rhineland from Germany, Lord Kilmarnock to Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 11 September 1922; Pawley, *The Watch on the Rhine*, 5.

how there were equally localities where inhabitants spoke German exclusively and 'would be more inclined to pronounce for Germany in the event of a popular consultation'. Add to this the Germanophile elements of the Walloon villages, and he believed 'the balance could hang in favour of our enemies'.⁹⁷

Coppejans had previously complained how the distribution of brochures and leaflets promoting the benefits that would accrue following incorporation into Belgium was an exercise largely lost on a peasantry, of whose adult population almost 12.5% could neither read nor write.⁹⁸ It is hard to ascertain what level of literacy existed among the remainder of the population.⁹⁹ Therefore, other methods needed to be used. Tangible proof of the material benefits of attaching to Belgium was what was needed, as according to the lieutenant general, the feeling in Malmédy in particular was that their region was less favoured than Eupen while under British occupations. General Michel had recently allowed for freedom of circulation in Eupen, and cafés were permitted to remain open twenty-four hours a day if they so desired. However, in Malmédy, many locals continued to rail against the rigid model of administration that exist under Hyslop, which was perceived to be coloured by an undisguised deference to the German authorities. In Brussels, Albert de Bassompierre, who headed the *comité politique* at the Belgian Foreign Ministry, told Foreign Minister Hymans how:

The Germans are working the spirits of the population with impunity against us, in spite of the fact that they have renounced all rights to Malmédy and having ratified the Treaty; the English passively lend them support being incapable of doing otherwise since they don't know the true sentiments of the people.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷AAEB, 10.792/I/362, Eupen-Malmédy, Rapport du Lieutenant General Coppejans, 8 July 1919.

⁹⁸*Statistique de la Belgique: population, recensement général* (31 Décembre 1920) (Bruxelles: M. Weissenbruch, 1926), 560–561.

⁹⁹AAEB, 10.791/I/3, Eupen-Malmédy, Lieutenant General Commandant Le Chef d'État Major Coppejans, Ministère de la Guerre to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 3ème rapport mensuel sur l'état d'esprit des populations de la 4ème zone d'occupation, 7 March 1919.

¹⁰⁰AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmédy, Albert de Bassompierre to Paul Hymans, 18 July 1919.

Across the border in Belgium, and in spite of the zealous activism of Bragard and his followers, the ‘odious character’ of the German occupation left little space for either altruism or empathy towards these *frères retrouvés*, whether Walloon or otherwise.¹⁰¹ Belgium suffered a total of 58,637 military losses as a result of the First World War, with slightly more civilian losses of around 62,000. This equated to 1.63% of the population. Although these figures are only a fraction of the losses suffered by other belligerents in the war (the French military losses alone were just under 1.4 million, with civilian losses of 300,000), the country’s infrastructure and economy had been greatly impacted, not only by four years and four months of a merciless occupation, but also due to the fact that Belgium, along with the northern departments of France, formed the epicentre of the conflict on the Western Front. A considerable effort would be required to deal with the severe social and economic dislocation left behind in the wake of the war. The extent of the material and infrastructural damage included the destruction of factories and business premises left gutted by retreating Germans, as well as the complete ruination of thousands of hectares of Belgium’s forests, which had either been deliberately destroyed or cut down to fuel the German war effort.¹⁰² The physical devastation caused to the country’s infrastructure and railway lines necessitated considerable reinvestment on a grand scale. In all, a total amount of 23,266,000 gold francs was absorbed by the reconstruction effort in the ‘devastated regions’ (*les régions dévastées*) alone.¹⁰³ That said, the relative speed by which the country recovered from the dire situation in which it found itself in 1918 was much faster than that experienced by its continental neighbours.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹Henri Haag, La Belgique en November 1918, *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, XVI (1969), 153–160.

¹⁰²M. Henriquet, Comment les Allemands ont saccagé nos forêts, *La Revue Belge* (Bruxelles, 1919), 485–497; R. Depoortere, L’évaluation des dommages subis par l’industrie belge au cours de la Première Guerre mondiale, *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire*, 67 (IV) (1989), 748–767; FO 608/125, F.H. Villiers to Lord Balfour, 30 December 1918; Albert Janssen, *Le redressement des finances publiques belges: communication faite à la Société d’Économie Politique de Paris*, 5 janvier (Paris: Ed. De la France économique et financière, 1925), 3–4.

¹⁰³*Bulletin de l’Office des Régions Dévastées*, ii (Bruxelles: Ministère de l’Intérieur, Ministère des Affaires Economique, 1920), 2–4.

¹⁰⁴The Belgian delegation had been successful in gaining a priority payment of 2.5 billion gold marks which was to be repaid with interest. It also received a rather obscure

Across Belgium, people were still coming to terms with the acts of *incivisme* or 'un-Belgian activity' perpetrated by their fellow citizens during the occupation.¹⁰⁵ A period of chastisement saw those suspected of *incivisme* subjected to the rage of the mob and latterly that of the state via the *conseils de guerres*.¹⁰⁶ However, a rather less certain future awaited the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy, who now found themselves caught in the void between an allied occupation and impending annexation by Belgium. To the vast majority of Belgians, the people in these newly annexed territories were German. Thus, it was still too early to anticipate to what extent these *nouveaux Belges* would be accommodated or even tolerated by their new 'compatriots'. Some Belgians questioned the legitimate nature of these 'new Belgians' now suddenly declaring loyalty to the state. Cynics recalled how during the occupation 'all of the odious *Kommandanturs boches*, [and] all of the secret police who carried out this filthy job [...] were above all populated by Malmedians', the predominant fear being that '[t]hese *boches* will soon be able to come and strut down the boulevards, where for four years and four months they robbed, pillaged, denounced and imprisoned us'.¹⁰⁷

During the first few days of the war, the German eleventh infantry brigade attacked from Eupen, laying siege to Liège, while the thirty-eighth and forty-third brigades attacked the southern quarter of the city, having originated their attack from Malmedy. Troops also entered the

promise regarding its exemption from having to pay back its war debt. Janssen, *Le Redressement des finances publiques belges*, 5–7.

¹⁰⁵Xavier Rousseaux et Laurence van Ypersele, *La patrie crie vengeance! La répression des "inciviques" belges au sortir de la guerre 1914–1918* (Bruxelles: Le Cri, 2008), 7–10; *La Libre Belgique*, 30 November 1918.

¹⁰⁶Most of those suspected of treasonous behaviour fell under the terms of the Royal Order of 1917, or were subjected to various forms of public retribution depending on the degree of 'treason' committed by an individual. John Gilissen, *Étude statistique sur la répression de l'incivisme*, *Revue de Droit Pénal et de Criminologie*, 31 (1952), 513–628; Laurence van Ypersele, *Sortir de la guerre, sortir de l'occupation: Les violences populaires en Belgique au lendemain de la première guerre mondiale*, *Vingtième Siècle*, 83 (July–September 2004), 65–74.

¹⁰⁷AAEB, 10.792/I/68, Eupen-Malmedy, Albert Dandoy to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23 May 1919.

Belgian towns of Francochamps and Hockay from Malmedy.¹⁰⁸ The territorial gain of these two districts meant little, if accompanied by tens of thousands of boches who had the blood of countless Belgians on their hands.¹⁰⁹ Many displayed revulsion at the idea of allowing into the ‘bosom of the *mère patrie*’ this unknown entity, whilst a sizeable number of the population remained deeply suspicious of these *frères retrouvés* within its borders. People were in the main doubtful whether the benefits accruing to Belgium would make the annexation worthwhile. Others pointed to the dearth of dissenting voices echoing from Malmedy when the two cantons had been gifted to Prussia by the Treaty of Vienna a century earlier. It was even charged that it was Malmédians who had headed the invading hordes that had razed Louvain and other parts of Belgium, and that they were also the first to appear before the *conseils de guerre* after the war.¹¹⁰

An example of the level of disdain displayed by many Belgians towards their prospective compatriots is evident from the account given by one Belgian parliamentarian who visited the region around Eupen where Belgian troops had taken command. Having spent a number of days in the area of the Rhineland under Belgian occupation and later in Eupen, Maurice Crick recounted to parliament his amazement that the same functionaries who once tortured and murdered Belgian prisoners of war continued to work in the prisons following the allied occupation. An infuriated Crick insisted that ‘[w]e have not asserted ourselves as masters. One of the jails in which our compatriots had suffered the most is situated in the territory occupied by us at Anrath.’ Crick continued:

The authors responsible for the maltreatment of our men continue to occupy their positions of employment in the prison of Anrath. These Prussian functionaries, these ignoble brutes were the cause of physical and

¹⁰⁸John Horne & Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), 11.

¹⁰⁹The term *boche* was a vulgar form of French slang regularly used to describe a German soldier during the First World War. The word is thought to derive from a regional dialect word for cabbage, ‘*caboché*’, and in this way is comparable to the disparaging term ‘*kraut*’ used by many English speakers at the time.

¹¹⁰AAEB, 10.792/I/68, Eupen-Malmedy, Albert Dandoy to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23 May 1919.

mental torture of our deportees and the death of twenty of them. Not even an appropriate resting place for them, they were buried like dogs.¹¹¹

In Eupen, he noted how '[t]he *Landrat*, burgomasters, the clergy, teachers, and civil administrators who go from farm to farm requisitioning milk are all involved in spreading German propaganda.'¹¹² Crick charged that German state functionaries were abusing their power by forcing the more vulnerable members of society to sign various petitions against the Belgian annexation. The only remedy to such actions, he claimed, was to replace these functionaries, the clergy and other public officials with pro-Belgian activists and then one would see an immediate effect. He also called for a stricter form of interaction with the German officials in the occupied territories.¹¹³

There were nevertheless some attempts to de-stigmatize Belgium's newly adopted subjects and to offer them the benefit of the doubt. The political journal *Le Flambeau* struggled with the fact that, regardless of the actions of the German inhabitants of the *cantons r dimm s*, it was not so easy to come to terms with the realization that Walloon inhabitants had taken up arms against Belgium. That said, it argued that the real question that needed to be answered was if at that time 'their hearts had not protested in secret against the fratricidal task imposed by their detested masters'.¹¹⁴ Such a selective reassessment was almost as convenient as the newly contrived Belgian version of history that presented the anticipated annexation as more a 'reattachment', what the Belgian foreign minister, Paul Hymans, termed 'a correction of the historical situation'.¹¹⁵ This timely revision promoted the myth of a common past shared between the two border districts and the Belgian state to which neither had ever belonged. It also conflated the concepts of Walloon and Belgian identity, oblivious to the ever-widening cleavage between the Flemish and Walloon communities. In such a heightened atmosphere of post-war paranoia, it was relatively easy for either camp to indulge in

¹¹¹Annales Parlementaires de Belgique, Chambre des Repr sentants (*Chambre*), 14 May 1919, 883–887.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Gustave Charlier, Pour Malm dy, *Le Flambeau*, 1 (January 1919), 53–58.

¹¹⁵Archives G n rales du Royaume (AGR), Papiers Jaspas, T/031/02472/199, Paul Hymans to Lord Crowe, 17 June 1915.

such rhetoric as well as scaremongering over what might transpire in the event of either Brussels or Berlin gaining control over the territory.

Fears were prevalent that in the event of Belgian sovereignty being granted, the Belgian government would not recall the German currency but would instead deem it no longer legal tender. If this were the case, Léon Goffart of the Steinbach paper mill argued that many of the inhabitants of the region would go to ruin, and that ‘a veritable revolution would suddenly explode and the vast majority of Malmédians would manifest their desire for a return to Germany’.¹¹⁶ The question of what to do with the German marks in circulation remained an overriding concern for the Belgian Foreign Ministry. The value of the mark had plummeted in the wake of the war and this had left the inhabitants of the cantons in particular at a serious disadvantage. The Foreign Ministry urged that some temporary measures be put in place from the moment of provisional transfer. The primary concern for the Belgian authorities was the negative impact such a change of circumstances would have on popular opinion towards the new regime, and its eventual impact on any plebiscite. ‘[B]esides it is useful, from a political standpoint that these populations [sic] immediately feel that the regime change is favorable to them’.¹¹⁷

Such a reassurance was not to be given at any cost. It was thought neither advisable nor feasible to apply the rate of exchange previously agreed upon in old Belgium of 1.25 francs to the mark, as a means of replacing the over six billion marks introduced during the occupation. This rather generous exchange rate would in time have a tremendously negative impact on the Belgian economy.¹¹⁸ The Foreign Ministry estimated that around six to eight hundred million marks were in circulation in Eupen-Malmedy for a population of around 60,000. Already, numerous opportunists had been discovered operating ‘a system of fraud’,

¹¹⁶AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Léon Goffart to Pierre Nothomb, 12 July 1919.

¹¹⁷AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Note par MAE sur la question des marcs dans les cercles d’Eupen et de Malmédy, 30 June 1919.

¹¹⁸The favourable exchange rate was in part due to the expectation by Belgium that Germany would be made to compensate it for any losses incurred. Henry L. Shepherd, *The Monetary Experience of Belgium 1914–1936* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1936), 10. Robert P. Grathwol, ‘Germany and the Eupen-Malmédy affair, 1924–1926: ‘Here lies the spirit of Locarno’, *Central European History*, 8 (3) (September 1975), 221–250; Enssle, *Stresemann’s Territorial Revisionism*, 34.

having bought or hoarded marks in anticipation of such a move by the Belgian Ministry of Finance. 'Germans from Aachen passed marks from hand to hand to the inhabitants of Eupen. Even Belgians speculated, and deposited marks in banks at Eupen.' The Foreign Ministry's official position was that it was not Belgium's role to allow 'the unjustified enrichment of individuals in whom it had little interest'. The immediate replacement of German marks by Belgian francs was not an option either. Such a 'brutal system' it was believed would inevitably alienate all those presently sympathetic to Belgium.¹¹⁹ In any event, Article 37 of the Versailles Treaty envisaged that those inhabitants who wished to opt for German citizenship could do so within a period of two years. If they did, they would have to leave the territory. In the meantime, it was not deemed beneficial to the Belgian state to concern itself with the financial circumstances of such people.¹²⁰

Despite the position taken by the Foreign Ministry in Brussels, Xhaflaire looked forward to a quick response from the Belgian government to the issue of the currency exchange. Mindful of the potential for fraud, he believed that this could be avoided if certain steps were taken. In his view, the first condition that anyone should have to fulfil before being able to exchange currency was to show proof of one's Belgian nationality. In other words, the individual would have to assume Belgian nationality. The government also needed to ensure that the money held by an individual was indeed their own. Therefore, Brussels needed to announce its intention to recall German marks. Following this, the communal administration would receive the various declarations from each commune, every inhabitant being obliged to make a declaration and to state the amount to be exchanged. The aforementioned conditions would have to be accepted in advance by each inhabitant.¹²¹ However, once Belgian nationality had been conferred, it might be difficult to prevent that person from fleeing across the border into Germany and renouncing their credentials.

¹¹⁹AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Note par le Ministère des Affaires Étrangères sur la question des marcs dans les cercles d'Eupen et de Malmédy, 30 June 1919.

¹²⁰*The Treaty of Versailles*, iii. i. 37.

¹²¹AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Léon Xhaflaire, 'Change des marcs' (no exact date but late July 1919).

As the high politics and military machinations continued to work themselves out in the meeting rooms of Brussels and Aachen, the arrival of foodstuffs to Eupen from Belgium in late July was a sign to many of better days to come. The delivery of 40,000 kg of flour, 10,000 kg of coffee and a further 10,000 kg of pepper had the effect of lifting spirits in Eupen, ‘as it allowed for white bread to be made’.¹²² However, if the Belgian authorities were preoccupied with ensuring a sufficient level of foodstuffs for their would-be citizens, German agents on the ground were still committed to feeding the locals with various tracts of anti-Belgian rhetoric. Lieutenant General Coppejans noted how in the small commune of Raeren, where pro-Belgian sympathy had been quite noticeable and ‘where former soldiers did not hide their aversion to the old authoritative regime’, this was now less evident.¹²³ However, in places like Walhorn, Astenet, Hauset and Eynatten, and to some degree Raeren, the local mood was still favourable to Belgium.¹²⁴ In the meantime, German officials in the Rhineland were anxious that a more concerted effort be made to clamp down on the work of Belgian propagandists, particularly in Eupen.

Apart from anticipating annexation by Belgium or looking forward to remaining in Germany, a minority of the population favoured some kind of union with the Rhineland. A Rhineland separatist movement had gathered considerable momentum following the declaration of an independent Rhenish republic within the German Reich on 1 June 1919.¹²⁵ Hans Adam Dorten, the former public prosecutor for Düsseldorf, read out the declaration which was later disseminated across the Rhineland. However, the Rhineland republic was still-born as, at the moment of its expected delivery, the movement failed to receive enough public support in what was an already difficult and

¹²²AAEB, 10.792/I/11557, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport relatif à l’occupation du cercle d’Eupen, Lieutenant Général Commandant P.O. Chef d’État Major, Coppejans to Chef d’État Major Général, 12 July 1919.

¹²³AAEB, 10.792/I/12058, Eupen-Malmedy, Lieutenant Coppejans, P.O., Rapport sur la situation dans le cercle d’Eupen to Le Chef d’État-Major, 27 July 1919.

¹²⁴AAEB, 10.792/I/12153, Eupen-Malmedy, Lieutenant Coppejans to Chef d’État-Major, 30 July 1919.

¹²⁵Hans A. Dorten, ‘The Rhineland movement’, *Foreign Affairs*, 3 (3) (April 1925), 404.

complex situation for Rhinelanders. However, the movement would continue to develop in different directions over the coming months and years.¹²⁶

Brussels demanded a more concerted effort to repel German propagandists and to cultivate pro-Belgian sentiment. In order to limit the spread of German propaganda, the Belgian authorities regularly intercepted post in the region. While most of the content shows that peace was almost universally welcomed among the population, there were already those who regarded the peace concluded at Versailles as the start of a transition which would lead to renewed war. One letter typical of such sentiment complained how:

In spite of all its tenacity Germany had to surrender before the numerical superiority of the enemy forces. It is with the revolver to the head that we were forced to sign. For the moment we must remain silent. As regards giving them satisfaction they know that it is impossible. Who will live shall see!

Another stated:

In Bonn, students manifest their discontent. They ask only one thing: revenge. It is unfortunate to have arrived at such a result, having endured all that which the German people have suffered. We needed an amicable peace and we obtained a peace inspired by hate. This represents as much danger for the victor as it does for the vanquished. Eight out of ten students are former officers who have to live under the occupation.¹²⁷

¹²⁶What facilitated the agitation for a neutral and independent Rhineland to continue to gather steam was the fact that France was not averse to the establishment of a buffer state under French protection. TNA, FO/371/7521, Separatist movement in Rhineland, 336/18/76–9, Freiherr von Korff, Polizeipräsident von Aachen, 'A review of the development of the Rhineland separatist movement in Aix-la-Chapelle, comprising the period from the outbreak of the German revolution until today', 7 June 1922 [Translation]. See also, Martin Schlemmer, 'Los von Berlin': *Die Rheinstaatbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007); Reimer, *Rheinlandfrage und Rheinlandbewegung*, 135.

¹²⁷AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Extracts from censored post included in Rapport hebdomadaire de la censure, armée belge, GQG, État-Major, 2è section, 9 July 1919; Sous-Chef d'État Major Général Maglinsen to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 10 July 1919.

The prevalent fear in business circles was that Belgium lagged behind Germany in terms of commercial life.¹²⁸ In other correspondence, much credit was given to the Belgian military for the way their soldiers conducted themselves toward the population. One native of Eupen wrote, 'It appears that the conditions will become slightly better as soon as the peace is ratified. Here in the region of Eupen one rejoices to be divested of the Prussian yoke.'¹²⁹

A further measure to help limit the influence of disruptive German elements was to control movement to and from both districts. A *carte d'identité* was now required for movement within and between districts, or if one intended travelling to a Belgian destination up to 15 km beyond the provisional border. For distances greater than 15 km, the traveller needed to obtain a *laissez-passer* from the occupying authorities. If wishing to go to the area on the left bank of the Rhine occupied by the Belgian army, a *carte d'identité* was also now required. In order to enter the zone occupied by other allied armies, a separate visa was an additional requirement.¹³⁰

In spite of these measures, the fact that Malmedy was still not under the control of the Belgian military frustrated plans to establish any effective presence in the territory. Whilst much progress seemed to be evident at an official level, in Malmedy the local pro-Belgian inhabitants continued to express their frustration with what appeared to be Belgian political inertia in delaying the recall of German marks and in replacing the occupying British troops with Belgian ones. Failure to do so at the earliest opportunity would make it all the more difficult to roll back the tide of German propaganda, which threatened to engulf the region before the *Brabançonne* was given its first airing. Various Belgian representatives had made this view known to the British authorities over a number

¹²⁸AAEB, 10/792/I/9783, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport sur les mouvements politiques et sociaux dans les populations, Le Chef d'État-Major Général Maglinsen, GQG, armée belge to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 9 July 1919.

¹²⁹AAEB, 10.792/I/9814, Eupen-Malmedy, Extracts from censored post included in Rapport hebdomadaire de la censure, armée belge, GQG., État-Major 2è section, 9 July 1919; Sous-Chef d'État Major Général Maglinsen to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 10 July 1919.

¹³⁰AAEB, 10.792/I/633/13, Eupen-Malmedy, 'Circulation entre les cercles d'Eupen et de Malmedy d'une part; les pays alliés et neutres d'autre part', Le Chef de Cabinet to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 1 July 1919.

of months.¹³¹ Earlier in July, Hymans wrote to the British ambassador Villiers to make clear to the British government Belgium's 'desire' to take control of Malmedy.¹³²

It was Supreme Allied Commander Marshal Ferdinand Foch who had first proposed which areas would fall under allied control following the signing of the armistice in November 1918. When later asked to alter the limits so as to enable Belgian forces to occupy Malmedy, Foch seemed disinterested. Instead, he advised that the British and Belgian commanders settle the issue between themselves. However, General Sir William Robertson, commander of the British Army of the Rhine, considered any such change a political matter and pointed the Belgian authorities in the direction of the Foreign Office in London.¹³³ The situation remained stalled for some time. Hymans felt that valuable time was being lost during which the *Landrat* in Malmedy had continued to 'oppress his subjects saddling them with taxes and doing all he could to persuade them against Belgium'.¹³⁴

That said, the Belgian state was still grappling with many problems of its own as a result of the Great War. The state infrastructure needed to be rebuilt particularly in the devastated regions, a task requiring considerable investment. As a result, the diplomatic wheels of Belgium's state machinery moved slowly to impose its will in the region. As late as July 1919, the Foreign Ministry complained that no map either topographic or geographic of the recently ceded territories existed within the department. According to Article 38 of the Versailles Treaty, the German government had to submit 'without delay' all the archives, registers, plans, titles and all related documentation concerning the ceded territories to Belgium.¹³⁵ The most important map required at this time, however, was a blueprint with which Brussels could chart its future involvement in Eupen-Malmedy. Gaining territory was one thing; transforming mindsets was quite another.

¹³¹Marks, *Innocent Abroad*, 156–158.

¹³²AAEB, 10.792/I/5585, Eupen-Malmedy, Paul Hymans to Sir F.H. Villiers, Ministre d'Angleterre, 6 July 1919.

¹³³Robertson had succeeded General Sir Herbert Plummer in March 1919. General Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshall* (London: Constable, 1921), 6–12.

¹³⁴AAEB, GB/1919/II, Hymans to Lord Birkenhead, 20 July 1919.

¹³⁵AAEB, 10.792/I/5843, Eupen-Malmedy, Buisset to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 2 July 1919.

HENRI DELVAUX DE FENFFE'S BRIEF TENURE AS ROYAL HIGH COMMISSIONER OF EUPEN-MALMEDY

General Michel had initially been touted as someone in the right place at the right time who could assume the role of High Commissioner for Eupen-Malmedy but he had been somewhat discredited for his inertia in dealing with German aggression on the one hand and his lack of empathy towards them on the other. Paul Hymans in his memoirs offers quite a different reason for not choosing Michel. Having initially considered him for the post, Hymans invited the general to the cabinet room for an informal interview and asked him 'off the cuff' whether he went to mass. When a slightly startled Michel answered, 'No', Hymans responded by saying, 'Well! It is useless then to continue this conversation.' For Hymans, the people of Eupen-Malmedy, whether Walloon or German, had one defining common trait and that was their Catholic faith. This he believed had to be taken advantage of, as it was also the common denominator between them and the Belgian people.¹³⁶

In his report to the King in July 1919, Albert de Bassompierre declared that the recently appointed Governor of the devastated regions, Henri Delvaux de Fenffe, appeared to be ready-made for the post of High Commissioner of Eupen-Malmedy. For eleven years, de Fenffe had served as the Governor of Liège. Under pressure from the German authorities during the occupation, he refused to carry out his functions and was duly dismissed. 'His reputation', wrote Bassompierre, 'along with his perfect knowledge of the region and of the German language, particularly recommend him to the post of high commissioner. Nobody better than he could preside over the happy return of these ancient Belgian people to the bosom of the Nation [sic].'¹³⁷

De Fenffe visited Malmedy on 5 July as High Commissioner designate for the first time. He was cordially received by Count Pret de Calesberg, head of the Belgian mission there. The local pro-Belgian newspaper *La Warche* described de Fenffe as 'a convinced Catholic, profoundly religious and largely tolerant [...] In brief it seems that once

¹³⁶Paul Hymans, *Mémoires*, (2 vols.), i (Bruxelles: Éditions Cie l'Institut de Sociologie Solvay, 1958), 465-466.

¹³⁷AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Albert de Bassompierre, Rapport au roi.

again one has the right man on the right place [sic].¹³⁸ When Xhaflaire wrote to the newly nominated high commissioner a few days later, de Fenffe was seen to demonstrate a firm understanding of the great depth of the task before him. Xhaflaire informed him that many of the 'old-guard' were going to leave their administrative posts in Eupen. Those whom Xhaflaire termed as *Hilfsarbeiter*, along with a number of other administrative and state functionaries, were likely to stay. However, a few of these latter had the potential to pose any number of problems for the incoming governor—not least the teaching staff who, Xhaflaire believed, needed to be examined by a general inspector sent from Brussels.¹³⁹

Many schoolteachers proved less than enthusiastic about the coming transfer of power, and as a consequence the younger inhabitants of the region proved the most 'chauvinistic' towards the annexation.¹⁴⁰ Such deadwood could prove at least cumbersome to any new administration, and indeed possessed the potential to rot the apparatus of government from within. The appointment of an inspector in each district would, he argued, enable the newly formed regime to consider what measures to take 'to study the worth of these teachers, and especially to inform us of their mind-set. Which is very important'.¹⁴¹

The teaching staff in the various schools and *athénées* would continue to be the most distrusted segment of public administration over the coming years, as it was well recognized that, beyond the battlefield, the classroom was a potent incubator of insurgency. Control of this particular public space was vital in order for any transitory arrangement to work. In this regard, Xhaflaire identified the communes of Raeren, Kettenis, Eynatten and Walhorn in the district of Eupen as localities where the most pro-Belgian sentiment could be found. However, the remaining communes were deemed to be less reliable and therefore needed to be 'worked on'.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ *La Warche*, 12 July 1919.

¹³⁹ AAEB, 10/792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Léon Xhaflaire to Baron Delvaux de Fenffe, 16 July 1919.

¹⁴⁰ AAEB, 10/792/I/10388/928, Eupen-Malmedy, Memo from Lieutenant Général Commandant de l'Armée d'Occupation to Le Chef d'État-Major, 16 June 1919.

¹⁴¹ AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Léon Xhaflaire to Henri Delvaux de Fenffe, 16 July 1919.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

Delvaux de Fenffe's role as governor would not be effective until after the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles by the Belgian parliament and its signing by Germany. In the meantime, the governor designate was intent on making as much headway as possible. Before long, de Fenffe had managed to sketch a rough idea of what was required to hit the ground running. Addressing an interministerial meeting on 18 July 1919, he noted how 'at Eupen we rely on numerous sympathie, in Malmedy, we do not find sufficient support among the English authorities and under these conditions sympathy towards Belgium does not increase. We have to react.'¹⁴³ It was envisaged that the future Royal High Commissioner or governor of Eupen Malmedy would be directly responsible to the prime minister. Thus, to facilitate the relationship between the office of prime minister and that of governor of Eupen-Malmedy a general secretariat was created in Brussels.¹⁴⁴

De Fenffe complained that the number of functionaries being allotted to him was insufficient and demanded an increase. He readily understood the need to counter an already well-rooted pro-German propaganda movement with a clear and precise message of intent from Brussels. Acknowledging the French experience in Alsace and Lorraine, he placed great emphasis on the role of a superior council *conseil supérieur* whose function it would be to advise the high commissioner on various aspects of governance and to provide him with information on the public mood at any given time. He demanded that the superior council's composition of six members be increased to twelve or even eighteen:

I attribute a serious importance to this consultative committee which may become an excellent means of information, of control, of propaganda, of encouragement for those who will help us and I think that it must be numerous enough to represent the diverse interests and regions of the territory.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Procès-verbal de la séance de la Commission interministérielle chargée d'étudier les mesures préparatoires pour l'exécution des clauses du Traité de Paix relatives aux cercles d'Eupen et de Malmédy, 18 July 1919.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Baron Delvaux de Fenffe to Paesmans, 27 July 1919.

This criticism was taken on board by Brussels, and the six-member superior council was eventually doubled and now consisted of twelve members, six of whom were chosen by the prime minister from the ranks of officials in Brussels, while a further six were to come from the local reservoir of talent in Eupen-Malmedy, to be chosen by the high commissioner himself. While chairing an interdepartmental meeting at the offices of the Belgian Foreign Ministry on 31 July 1919, de Fenffe appeared on top of his brief. The meeting was part of the process of organizing *chefs de service* for the Eupen-Malmedy government who, in effect, would head micro versions of the respective government departments in Brussels. De Fenffe urged those departmental representatives in attendance to make serious efforts to convince functionaries from each department to render service in the new territories, so as to reassure the population of Belgium's sympathy towards them.¹⁴⁶

Outside of political considerations, it was recognized that a parallel transformation would be necessary in terms of the ecclesiastical administration of the borderland territory. Brussels had already demanded assurances from the Holy See that, following the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, a rapid transfer of the *cercles* would be facilitated, prying them from the clutches of the archbishop of Cologne and tying them instead to the diocese of Liège.¹⁴⁷ The Belgian representative to the Holy See, Count Léo d'Ursel, reported to Hymans that when he raised the matter of the ecclesiastical transfer of Eupen-Malmedy to 'a Belgian bishopric' with Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, the Vatican secretary of state, he was told that 'in principle the Holy See, without hesitation' agreed with the idea.¹⁴⁸ However, it seemed that d'Ursel had misunderstood the Cardinal's intentions. Gasparri had merely promised to give the request

¹⁴⁶AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Procès-verbal de la séance du 31 juillet 1919 tenue, au Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, entre les délégués de différents départements ministériels aux fins d'étudier les mesures préparatoires à la délimitation des territoires réunis à la Belgique, en vertu de l'article 35 du traité de Paix [sic], 31 July 1919.

¹⁴⁷Hymans had initially argued for the 're-attachment' of Malmedy to the bishopric of Namur and that of Eupen to Liège. SAE, BE-A0531.5/122/21, Hubert Willems, Le lent transfert ecclésiastique d'Eupen-Malmedy 1919–1922—le martyrologe de son clergé [unpublished] (Bruxelles, 1999), 3–5.

¹⁴⁸AAEB, Saint Siège, 10.792/I/134/65, Paul Hymans to Viscount Léo d'Ursel, 5 July 1919; Viscount d'Ursel to Paul Hymans, 10 July 1919.

‘serious consideration’, as is evinced in his written correspondence to d’Ursel a few days after their meeting.¹⁴⁹

Baron Moncheur at the Foreign Ministry was fearful that any further delay would only play into the hands of Cardinal Hartmann, whose propagandizing threatened to destabilize the transitory process. He asked that d’Ursel bring such activities to the attention of Gasparri.¹⁵⁰ When d’Ursel again met with Cardinal Gasparri in the summer of 1919, he impressed upon him the necessity that such a move coincide with the territorial transfer to Belgium. Gasparri was accommodating at first and told d’Ursel:

Leave us time to prepare the bull. The rule followed by the Holy See in such a matter is to wait until the transfer is a *fait accompli* and then to proceed to the execution of the measures in an ecclesiastical fashion.¹⁵¹

However, Gasparri had been completely unaware that the transfer was not as yet definitive, due to the condition of the popular consultation, and duly told the count that ‘this changes the question’. The cardinal made it clear that the Vatican was unwilling to move on the transfer of Eupen and Malmedy to a Belgian bishopric until after the popular consultation had taken place and the sovereign status of Eupen-Malmedy had become definitive.¹⁵² The count explained that such urgency was to help stem the tide of anti-Belgian propaganda, which continued to inundate the cantons ahead of the forthcoming referendum. Gasparri, acknowledging Brussels’ desire to stem German propaganda in the region, pointed out that he too recognized the German government’s desire that ‘Belgian propaganda be halted or moderated’. However, he seemed open to d’Ursel’s suggestion that the territory be taken away from the influence of the archbishop of Cologne during the six-month period of the consultation. Cardinal Hartmann’s place would be temporarily filled by an ecclesiastical administrator chosen from among the

¹⁴⁹Willems, *Le lent transfert ecclésiastique d’Eupen-Malmedy 1919–1922*, 3–5.

¹⁵⁰AAEB, Saint Siège, 10.792/I, Baron de Moncheur to Viscount d’Ursel, 9 August 1919.

¹⁵¹AAEB, 10.792/I/157/81, Eupen-Malmedy, Viscount d’Ursel to Hymans, 16 August 1919.

¹⁵²AAEB, 10.792/I/17 Eupen-Malmedy, Viscount d’Ursel to the Belgian Cabinet, 19 August 1919; AAEB, 10.792/I/160/83, Viscount d’Ursel to Hymans, 18 August 1919.

Belgian clergy within one of the bishoprics to which either Eupen or Malmedy would be attached.¹⁵³ The Holy See took some time to consider the request. It eventually agreed to nominate an apostolic administrator in the person of Archbishop Sebastiano Nicotra, who had served as the papal nuncio to Belgium since December 1916. Hence, not until the registers of the popular consultation had closed and its result endorsed by the League of Nations would the ecclesiastical status of Eupen-Malmedy be known.

In the meantime, it was expected that the incoming governor would continue to familiarize himself with his new mission. However, Delvaux de Fenffe soon became increasingly disillusioned by the attitude of the Belgian authorities. When first considered for the position of governor of Eupen-Malmedy, he had been promised by none other than Paul Hymans that the government 'in every possible way would support his desiderata'.¹⁵⁴ Since then, de Fenffe seemed frustrated by what he saw as a tight-fisted Belgian government unwilling to back up its rhetoric with action. In his opinion, 'the success of the High-Commissioner's mission was contingent on the prestige of his situation'. On a number of occasions, he had sought clarification on the type of accommodation available to him as well as details on the trappings and perks associated with this most 'prestigious position'. De Fenffe believed in making a positive impression on his new charges from the very first encounter:

The intended populations being very accustomed to a uniform, I shall wear a silk scarf in the Belgian colours with Golden dragons around my neck, as an emblem of the High Commissioner – Governor – and the domestics will wear a hat with a badge and a tricolour ribbon.¹⁵⁵

The way in which de Fenffe perceived his new role is quite revealing, not just on a personal level, but in terms of how the acquisition of Eupen-Malmedy was being interpreted at an official level. De Fenffe demanded

¹⁵³AAEB, 10.792/157/81, 157/81 Viscount d'Ursel to Paul Hymans, 16 August 1919; Walter Kaefer, 'L'attitude du clergé catholique au cours des années 1919–1925 dans les cantons d'Eupen-Malmedy-St. Vith', *Folklore Stavelot Malmedy Saint Vith*, 46 (1982), 69–80.

¹⁵⁴AAEB, Eupen-Malmedy, 10.792/I, Hymans to Delvaux de Fenffe, 10 July 1919.

¹⁵⁵AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Baron Delvaux de Fenffe to Finance Minister Delacroix, 19 July 1919.

that the matter of primogeniture also be considered so as to enable him to pass on the title of Royal High Commissioner—Governor of Eupen Malmedy to his first-born son. In this light, and contrary to the rhetoric that infused Hyman’s arguments over the cession of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium as being a ‘correction of the historical record’, it appeared more akin to a localized form of colonization.

Paesmans had written to de Fenffe earlier, citing that only those expenses deemed essential to the running of the high commissioner’s office would be considered by the state.¹⁵⁶ De Fenffe by now was growing increasingly impatient with Brussels. In August, he wrote to Paesmans stating that in spite of his best efforts he felt that he had been placed in an impossible position.¹⁵⁷ Within days, Delvaux de Fenffe, who had just been made a baron, resigned his position as Royal High Commissioner designate of Eupen-Malmedy.¹⁵⁸ Ironically, two days after de Fenffe’s departure, Belgian troops finally took hold of Malmedy.¹⁵⁹

From early morning, a crowd of anxious well-wishers thronged the railway station, even though the first arrival of troops was not due until early afternoon. At about three o’clock, a train carrying a detachment of Belgian soldiers passed through on its way to the military camp at Elsenborn. Two hours later, Belgian cavalry entered Malmedy in celebratory mood under the command of Major Daufresne de la Chevalerie, passing under an *arc de triomphe* which had been especially erected by locals. The cortege then made its way to the Hôtel de Ville where the communal council awaited.¹⁶⁰ Now all of the territory conditionally ceded to Belgium in the Versailles Treaty had fallen under its sole control, albeit not definitively. Tensions remained high in the towns and villages of the disputed districts. Reports of intimidation by the Belgian military against members of the population reached the German authorities in Aachen. It was not unusual for Belgian military personnel travelling by train into the Rhineland to intimidate and bully the railway personnel, whose uniforms still bore the insignia of the German state. On a number of occasions, railway staff members were humiliated by

¹⁵⁶AAEB, 10/792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Paesmans to de Fenffe, 9 August 1919.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., De Fenffe to Paesmans, 10 August 1919.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., Albert de Bassompierre to Lieutenant de Pret, 12 August 1919.

¹⁵⁹Doegen, *Die Abtretung*, 98–101.

¹⁶⁰*La Warche*, 16 August 1919.

Belgian soldiers and had pistols or riding whips waved in their faces, reminding them that a new authority now ruled over them. Incidents of violent punch-ups between members of the Belgian military and locals were now a common occurrence. Such scenes were reported as being replicated throughout the Belgian zone of occupation. Local disaffection with the Belgian authorities manifested itself in the tearing down of Belgian flags on a regular basis, not least around the railway station in Malmedy. Numerous pamphlets were disseminated on the trains travelling to and from Aachen, detailing the injustice of the Belgian occupation and the horror of the proposed annexation. In response to the increasing number of such incidents, the local curfew was put back to six o'clock in the evening.¹⁶¹

When taken together with the tense situation unfolding in the districts, the resignation of Belgium's first choice for governor sent a very negative message to the pro-Belgian community. However, within days of de Fenffe's departure, a new name was being touted around the corridors of the Foreign Ministry. At the time, Herman Baltia commanded the ninth infantry division stationed in Liège and was a decorated lieutenant general who had served with distinction in the war. The new nominee was, however, largely unknown outside military circles, although it was understood that he had a remarkably close relationship with King Albert. In recommending Lieutenant General Baltia for the post of governor of Eupen-Malmedy, Paul Hymans pointed to his 'organizational skills in military commands' which he had consistently displayed during the war. Baltia's fluency in German and his extensive knowledge of the patois of the region also helped to propel him to this new position.¹⁶²

Born to a Belgian father and a German mother from Lorraine, Baltia it seemed was the natural heir to Delvaux de Fenffe's throne. Albeit not immersed in the bureaucratic and administrative milieu of his predecessor, he nevertheless shared a similar tenacity in carrying out his duties to the letter. But the war was over now, and new skills and new strategies needed to be developed in order to convince, cajole and, if need be, coerce the populace towards Belgium. What changes this prospective

¹⁶¹ BAB, R8028/101, Kristian Kraus, 'Unter belgischer Herrschaft im Kreise Malmedy', Berlin, 28 October 1919.

¹⁶² Ibid.

new governor of Eupen-Malmedy would bring remained to be seen. What was certain, however, was that in this no man's land of apprehension a new chapter was about to open with the coming into effect of the Versailles Treaty on 10 January 1920.¹⁶³

“Where one feels good there is the *patrie*” (*ubi bene, ibi Patria*), wrote Nicolas Pietkin the much revered abbot of Sourbrodt, whilst commenting on the level of mutual respect that had once existed between the Walloon minority and their German compatriots under Friedrich Wilhelm IV in the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁴ Over a century later, the interregnum of uncertainty between the end of the Great War and the establishment of the transitory government was one where the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy once again looked to their own immediate circumstances, whilst hoping for the best and fearing the worst. But to many it seemed that in spite of the promises made by representatives of the Belgian state, this borderland territory, which for centuries had stood on the cusp of conflict and controversy, would continue to linger there for some time to come.

¹⁶³AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Paul Hymans confirms Baltia's appointment to the post of Royal High Commissioner for Eupen-Malmedy, 13 September 1919.

¹⁶⁴Joseph Bastin, ‘L'abbé Nicolas Pietkin’, *La terre wallonne* 21 (June 1921), 152–153; Colson, *Malmédy et les territoires*, 24.

‘Sounding Them Out’ Herman Baltia and the Installation of the Eupen-Malmedy Government

The incoming transitory government had much to do to balance the expectations of the government in Brussels against the concerns of Belgium’s newest citizens. Although conditionally ceded to Belgium, Eupen-Malmedy remained a territory that had to be won over, both physically and psychologically. The former, it was hoped, would be addressed through the holding of a popular consultation (*consultation populaire*), referred to in the treaty as a ‘public expression of opinion’.¹ Only after having ensured a successful conclusion to the consultation could Baltia and his administration hope to begin in earnest the process of national assimilation. However, prior to undertaking an exercise of such importance, Baltia had to concern himself more immediately with putting in place the mechanisms of the provisional government for Eupen-Malmedy, from the recruitment of the cabinet and various functionaries, to establishing a *modus vivendi* with their counterparts in Brussels. The sourcing of administrative personnel needed to be carefully co-ordinated, and their selection balanced, so as not to intimidate the local population, while at the same time safeguarding against infiltration by anti-Belgian elements.

¹The French term *consultation populaire* will mainly be employed except when citing the English language version of Article 34 of the Versailles Treaty directly, in which the term ‘public expression of opinion’ is used.

Throughout the period of his tenure, Baltia would rule mostly by decree, thus fulfilling a function along the lines of a commissary dictator or what the German philosopher Carl Schmitt defined as an *Aktionskommissar*. Although the powers granted to him were considerable, Baltia remained answerable to the Belgian prime minister and later the interior minister.² That said, the extent to which Baltia was answerable to the interior minister is a moot point. During a parliamentary debate on the state of education in Eupen-Malmedy in 1922, the then Minister of the Interior Berryer stated that 'Baltia is not a subordinate ... he is not an employee, no more than a judge is the subordinate or the employee of the minister for justice'.³ In terms of his regime's relationship with Brussels, however, it would be incorrect to assume that both administrations were approaching this state of exception from the same vantage point. Baltia professed an inherent lack of respect for the political class in Belgium, and was particularly suspicious of political opportunists.⁴ Understanding his relationship with Brussels therefore, is important in assessing how his transitory government functioned, particularly in the earliest days of the regime, and the impact this relationship had on the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy. A military man who saw himself as a soldier and not a politician, Herman Baltia remains a peripheral yet curious figure of the interwar period, at least beyond the Eastern Cantons.

For almost a century within the collective memory of the territory over which he ruled, Baltia has been disparagingly branded 'a dictator', with the seat of his administration, which today houses the *Ministère des Finances* in Malmedy, mockingly referred to as '*le palais Baltia*'.⁵ However, to those who decided to throw in their lot with Belgium in the interwar period, he was the harbinger of a better future. Baltia possessed a distinct understanding of the German psyche and furthermore understood the pull of primordial attachments, as he himself was the son of

²Following the law of 17 July 1921, the functions of the Haut Commissariat now fell under the authority of the Belgian Interior Ministry, *Journal Officiel—Malmedy-Eupen* (JOME), 23 July 1921.

³APB, Paul Berryer, *Chambre*, 25 January 1923, 351.

⁴Staatsarchiv Eupen (SAE), Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/219, Mémoires, Band 1, (Hereafter, C.3.3.III/X85/219, Mémoires, Band 1) 57.

⁵Interview with Raymond Jacob, President of Malmedy Folklore, at his home in Malmedy, 8 November 2008.

mixed German and Luxembourg parentage. During the war, Baltia kept a diary in which he jotted down the details of various military encounters and campaigns. These are interspersed with more philosophical and personal ponderings concerning his past, his family and the much-changed circumstances in which he now found himself as he accepted the responsibility of assimilating former subjects of the *Kaiserreich* to the Kingdom of Belgium. His earliest diary entries allow some insight into the character of the man who would play a defining role in the history of Belgium's Eastern Cantons in the interwar period. These personal reminiscences are also helpful in providing a brief account of Baltia's early life and military career prior to his appointment as royal high commissioner, and afford a better understanding of the man whose efforts aimed to speed the people of Eupen-Malmedy 'into the bosom of the Belgian patria'.⁶

LEARNING TO SWIM: HERMAN BALTIA'S EARLY LIFE AND MILITARY CAREER

From the time of his childhood growing up in Belgium to his experiences on the Western Front, Herman Baltia's conception of the German psyche underwent nothing short of a metamorphosis. As the son of a Luxembourg father and a German mother, from a young age Herman Baltia had become well accustomed to the importance of identity. Born in the Brussels district of Saint-Josse-ten-Noode in 1863, the young Herman soon got used to moving home as his father's military career demanded. Charles Baltia was a Lieutenant General in the Belgian army. He had left his parental home of Betzdorf in the Duchy of Luxembourg at an early age to pursue a career in the Belgian military. The Baltia name was no stranger to military exploits. Baltia's paternal grandfather,

⁶'Dans le giron de la patrie belge', Royal Club Wallon (RCW), E.0.323/ 50.30.11RP, 'Proclamation' in *Recueil des décrets, arrêtés et avis, i, 10 Janvier—10 Juillet 1920* (Nos. 1–84 & 501–528) (hereafter, *Recueil i*) (Stavelot: Imprimerie de la Warche, 1920), 4. Such terminology was in common usage in Belgium at this time, whether in official political correspondence or in newspaper and journal articles dealing with the Eupen-Malmedy question. Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Belges (AAEB), Eupen-Malmedy, 10.792/I/466/250, de Bassompierre (Belgian Ambassador to Japan but formerly of the *comité politique* in the Foreign Ministry), to Émile Vandervelde, 3 September 1926.

Remacle Baltia, had previously served with distinction as a cavalry captain under Napoleon at Jena, Eylau, Friedland and Ulm.⁷

Much of Baltia's childhood was spent in the company of his mother Frédérique. She was a native of Lorraine, and a descendant of Huguenots forced to flee to the Rheinisch provinces following the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.⁸ Herman Baltia was just seven years old when the Franco–Prussian War broke out. At the time, he lived with his mother and his two sisters in the countryside of Arlon in the south-east of Belgium, not far from the districts which in later life he would govern. In the early days of the Franco–Prussian war, Baltia's father was stationed at Gros-Fays where he had command of the outposts. One of young Herman's most abiding memories of that conflict was the siege of Longwy, where from the hill at Herschberg he witnessed the terrifying explosions showering their cinders on to the little village below.⁹ Schooling in Arlon was followed by classical studies in Greek and Latin at the Jesuit college of St Barbe in Ghent, while his father was once again reassigned to a nearby garrison. While at St Barbe, Baltia shared a classroom with the celebrated Belgian poet Maurice Maeterlinck. The young Baltia marvelled at the rounded intellect of someone like Maeterlinck, 'who seemed to know so much about so many things'. Where the young Maeterlinck found intellectual fulfilment in books of philosophy, Baltia was more taken with adventure stories as conjured up by renowned authors such as Jules Verne, or true-life tales of the great explorers.¹⁰ In time, his youthful exuberance would be tempered by his experiences in the furnace of the Great War.

In June 1879, Charles Baltia was posted to Liège, where he took command of the third infantry division. Anxious that his son complete his studies in Ghent, Charles entrusted the care of young Herman to the Maeterlinck family, and thus Herman spent the summer of 1879 in the surroundings of their grand house on the banks of the Terneuzen canal, which linked Ghent to the port city of Terneuzen in the Netherlands on

⁷Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/219, Mémoires, Band 1, 12.

⁸Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/219, Mémoires, Band 1, 12.

⁹Longwy is today a commune in the Meurthe et Moselle department in the north-eastern corner of France; Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/219, Mémoires, Band 1, 12.

¹⁰SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/221, Méditations: jeunesse et vie militaire (hereafter, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/221, Méditations: jeunesse et vie militaire), 31.

the western shore of the River Scheldt.¹¹ Baltia and Maeterlinck by now had struck up a close friendship and would regularly embark on boyish adventures together. On one particular occasion, the two youths went swimming in the nearby canal. As they were not so confident in their swimming abilities, they opted to swim as close to the canal bank as they could, so as 'to steady their nerves'. In spite of their cautious approach, however, it was not long before they got into some difficulty. It was only by chance that a local workman caught sight of the boys struggling to keep afloat in the water, and hurried to their assistance.¹² In the first few days of the war, Baltia would find himself endeavouring to defend that very same stretch of water which had almost cost him his life. At that stage in the war, the Germans were attempting to make good their failure to ensnare the Belgian forces at Antwerp.¹³ During the assault, Baltia thought again of his near-death experience as a naïve young boy and noted how, 'shortly after that adventure[,] I knew how to swim perfectly'. Indeed, Baltia was a man who used adversity to his advantage, but he remained a cautious individual at heart—traits which he would put to full use after the war when called to govern Belgium's newly annexed territories.

Despite his father's earnest desire for him to become an engineer, Baltia, in keeping with family tradition, had always felt drawn to the military life. Leaving Ghent, he later studied rhetoric and political science at the University of Liège, which lasted for just one year.¹⁴ At twenty years of age, he entered the *École Royale Militaire* in Brussels. Seven years later, he was accepted into the *École de Guerre*, and was orientated towards the military staff. Experienced in both cavalry and artillery, the young recruit had already earned a reputation for his organizational skills. He spoke German and Flemish fluently and was proficient in English. Within a short time, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant in the twenty-first division of the grenadiers, rising steadily through the

¹¹Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/221, *Méditations: jeunesse et vie militaire*, 31–33.

¹²*Ibid.*, 31.

¹³*Ibid.*, 36–39; John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1998), 106 & 127–128; Barbara Tuchman, *August 1914* (London: Constable, 1962), 243–244.

¹⁴Jacques Willequet, Baltia, *Biographie Nationale*, 40, xii (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 1977), 17–21.

ranks.¹⁵ By May 1894, he was appointed to the army's general staff and began a *stage* in the *Premier Regiment de Guides* until October 1894, when he enrolled in the equitation school. Recognized as an officer of high standing, his abilities and dedication continued to be regularly commented on by his superiors.¹⁶ In 1899, as a member of the *Société Belge d'Études Coloniales*, Baltia assumed the role of correspondent for the military journal *La Belgique Militaire* during the official inauguration by Prince Albert of the Matadi to Leopoldville railway line in the Congo.¹⁷ That same year, he married Gabrielle Charles, with whom he would share the rest of his life. The couple would never have children. In 1907, Baltia was promoted to the general staff of the fourth military division.¹⁸ As captain *adjoint*, he travelled to Algeria where he hoped to observe, among other things, the organization of infantry fusilier companies.¹⁹ A couple of months later, he was dispatched to the *Institut Cartographique Militaire* on matters concerning the Belgian colony in the Congo. This posting lasted for only a short period as, following his promotion to the rank of major the following year, health problems saw him taken ill with anaemia, and symptoms of scarlet fever and diphtheria. For nearly three months, he recuperated at the Mont Dore military hospital in Bournemouth, England.²⁰

In spite of such setbacks, his progression through the military ranks endeared him to his fellow officers and to King Albert also, whom Baltia encountered for the first time as a young prince visiting the *École Militaire* in the company of King Leopold II and Albert's father (and

¹⁵Koninklijk Legermuseum—Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire (KL-MRA), Baltia, DP/10898/4, Rapport sur les études.

¹⁶KL-MRA, Baltia, DP/10898/5, Le Ministère de la guerre to Général Commandant de l'Armée Belge, 24 May 1894.

¹⁷Hubert Willems, Deux Wallons au Congo: Pierre Forthomme—Herman Baltia, *La Vie Wallonne*, 60 (1986), 36–43 (38).

¹⁸KL-MRA, Baltia, DP/10898/12, Secrétaire Royale to Ministère de la Guerre, 14 June 1907.

¹⁹KL-MRA, Baltia, DP/10898/14, Herman Baltia to Ministère de la Guerre, September 1907 [no exact date].

²⁰Formerly the Mont Dore Hotel, it was requisitioned by the War Office in 1914 and served as a military hospital during the war. The hospital was quite innovative for its time, offering its clients hot and cold salt baths using water pumped in from the sea. Since 1921, it has served as Bournemouth Town Hall. KL-MRA, Baltia, DP/10898/17, *Certificat de visite*, 28 April 1909.

brother of Leopold II), Count Philip of Flanders. As King Leopold inspected the troops in the Cour d'Honneur, Baltia recalled how Albert, who was just nine years old at the time, began to run in and out of the lines of uniformed men, much to the chagrin of the officials.²¹ At that stage, Albert was fourth in the line of succession. However, he would in time find himself catapulted to the Belgian throne following the deaths of the three preceding heirs in quick succession, all of whom died prior to the passing of Leopold II in 1909.²² Albert was crowned King of the Belgians in December that same year. From the moment he succeeded to the throne, Albert endeared himself to his Belgian subjects. Before becoming known as the 'soldier king' Albert had been lovingly referred to as 'the people's king' due to his humble and unpretentious nature. However, his comportment during the war, and particularly during the Battle of the Yser, ensured the Belgian monarch's name would henceforth be synonymous with that of hero. In 1938, shortly before his death Baltia dedicated a book to the memory of King Albert which was a respectful homage to the 'soldier king' who had died tragically in a climbing accident four years previously. The book was further testament of the level of admiration which Baltia held for Belgium's beloved monarch.²³

In sharp contrast to the depth of his royal allegiance, throughout his life Baltia was less enamoured by politics, and in particular the political establishment in Brussels. As a young officer, he had derided Belgium's lack of preparedness for a war which he claimed had been predicted by a number of its military leaders. He laid the greatest share of the blame at the door of the political classes, whom he described as being devoid of purpose and vision. A certain segment of the military, in his view, had also been lacklustre in their approach to the war. Baltia acknowledged how there were those 'who didn't want to think about war', and who considered themselves as mere 'functionaries of a neutral state'. In his war diary, he wrote:

²¹Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/221, *Méditations: jeunesse et vie militaire*, 42.

²²Leopold II's son, Léopold Ferdinand, was heir apparent to the Belgian throne but died of pneumonia in 1869. Albert I's older brother, Prince Badouin, died of influenza in 1891 (although some controversy exists as to the exact circumstances of his death). When Albert's father Prince Philippe Count of Flanders died in 1905, Albert ascended to the Belgian throne.

²³Herman Baltia, *Le Roi Albert* (Bruxelles: Editions L'Avenir, 1938), *passim*.

All of those cowards fell in behind the pacifists, these good Utopians who preached the love of people, universal brotherhood, who demonstrated the material impossibility of a new war, and who swooned over the delightful discourses exchanged at peace congresses.²⁴

Baltia argued that the military, which had warned in the years leading up to the Great War that the possibility of international conflict had not been totally erased from the map of Europe, was 'badly looked upon'. They were seen as 'creatures of habit, dangerous and jingoistic'. The army, in Baltia's opinion, was considered by most Belgians as 'a useless luxury'.²⁵ He believed that a sense of patriotism was seen as having little relevance to a modern Belgium. However, shortly before the war, he noted how all seemed to change amidst a sudden burst of national enthusiasm. As he understood it, a concerted campaign was launched by the government and media to awaken Belgium from its slumber. Such attempts, however, were to prove too little too late. Ever scornful of the lack of joined-up thinking between Belgium's political leaders and its military, his distrust and almost complete lack of deference towards the political establishment would not be diluted by the ravages of war but instead became more pronounced.²⁶

Early in the war, as *chef d'état major* of the cavalry division, Baltia participated in the Battle of Haelen, which took place on 12 August 1914.²⁷ Haelen was Baltia's first experience of the war, and indeed of any war. The so-called 'Battle of the Silver Helmets'—taking its name from the hundreds of helmets that lay strewn on the battlefield after the encounter—did not resemble the more industrialized encounters that would come to characterize the greater part of the war. On the contrary, Haelen had all the air of a nineteenth-century engagement, with cavalrymen charging through the Belgian countryside. It was to be Belgium's only victory in the war without the aid of an allied force.²⁸ The Belgians were under the command of General Léon de Witte, while the German

²⁴Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/219, Mémoires, Band 1, 58.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/219, Mémoires, Band 1, 58.

²⁷A town in the south-eastern pocket of the Netherlands.

²⁸Matthew W. Speers, The Battle of Haelen 12 August 1914, in Spencer C. Tucker (ed.), *World War I: A Political, Social and Military History* (Santa Barbara, Cal.: ABC-Clío 2005), 531–532; Tuchman, *August 1914*, 189.

cavalry was led by General Georg von der Marwitz.²⁹ The battle lasted just one day, but was a bloody affair with over five hundred dead, mostly Belgians.³⁰ Baltia later saw action at Diksmuide in the west of Flanders in October 1915 during the Battle of the Yser. Promoted to general major in 1916, he later led the seventeenth brigade at Merckem during the Second Battle of Passchendaele between October and November 1917.

In April of that year, and by now a colonel, Baltia took charge of the tenth line regiment of the fourth artillery division in Liège. The prospect of not surviving the war was something he contemplated on more than a few occasions. But he remained philosophical about what might come to pass. Facing into the abyss of uncertainty, he thought of his father, and wished only to emulate the example set by him. In his war diary, he wondered:

Will I be one of the victims that the *patrie* must offer in the holocaust [sacrifice] so that God will grant us victory? Like so many others [...] and the best, I shall accomplish it, I hope in falling [in battle] in a way that is of benefit to my race, to my family, to my father, it is necessary that one says of me: he fell facing the sky, without bitterness or regret.³¹

As he contemplated his mortality, his future and the war, Baltia continued to be torn between the romantic notions of his mother's homeland, which he had carried with him since his youth, and the callous deeds now being perpetrated by Belgium's aggressors. Baltia again recalled the devotion he held for his mother—'her soul so full of German *poésie*'—whilst also acknowledging how '[M]y maturity, my emotions were upset and often confused by the education that I received from my German mother'. He called to mind idyllic childhood memories, 'happy hours spent along the Moselle [...] such gentle family relations that I had with a Prussian *parenté*, the use I had of German, the admiration that I professed for the order, the method and the science of German concepts.'³² These words were written as Baltia now began to reassess his admiration for everything German, while trying to come to terms with the barbaric

²⁹Léon de Witte, later Baron Léon de Witte de Haelen (1857–1933).

³⁰Herman Baltia, Haelen, in Baron C. Buffin, *Brave Belgians* (Alys Hallard, trans.) (Baron de Broqueville, pref.) (New York & London: G.P. Putnam's Sons 1918), 63–76.

³¹Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/221, Méditations, Band 1, 1.

³²Ibid., 12–13.

acts being meted out against his fellow Belgians as the country lay smothered beneath an oppressive German occupation. Accounts of the 'systematic barbarism' inflicted upon the civilian population, the regular and arbitrary instances of rape and public shootings, as well as the razing of villages and towns were first recorded by an official commission established by the Belgian government, which collected and assessed the testimonies of victims directly affected by the brutal actions of the German forces during the initial period of the occupation.³³ Other reports compiled by French and British investigators uncovered a litany of abuses by the occupying German forces, some of which were deemed as having been exaggerated for propaganda purposes.³⁴

In the midst of all the mayhem and bloody carnage on the Western Front, it was not unusual for Baltia to indulge his passion for watercolours and display them to his subordinates as a means of lifting their morale. This sensitive side to Baltia sat in sharp contrast to the otherwise tenacious character with whom many of his contemporaries—and also those who would have to deal with him in his later role as governor of Eupen-Malmedy—would have been more familiar.³⁵

As the war continued to drag on, the Belgian government was fearful that the neighbouring Duchy of Luxembourg would fall under French influence. Belgium had plans to incorporate the duchy into a Greater Belgium once the war had ended. In spite of the fact that Brussels had received an assurance from Paris that it had no such designs

³³The commission sat in Brussels, Antwerp, Le Havre, and London. Gustave Somville, *The Road to Liège: The Path of Crime 1914* (pref. Henry Carton de Wiart) (Bernard Miall, Trans.) (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918), v–xi.

³⁴*Commission d'enquête sur la violation des règles du droit des gens, des lois, et des coutumes de la guerre, Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique, 2 vols* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1915) (Belgian First Commission); *Commission d'enquête sur la violation des règles du droit des gens des lois et des coutumes de la guerre, Rapports sur la violation du droit des gens en Belgique* (Brussels & Liège, 1922); *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages appointed by His Britannic Majesty's Government and presided over by the Right Hon. Viscount Bryce, O.M. Cd. 7894* (New York, Macmillan & Co., 1915). John Horne and Alan Kramer clearly show that although somewhat inaccurate in parts, the Bryce report often understated the severity of the atrocities committed. *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 229–290.

³⁵*Eupen-Malmedy et son gouverneur, Mémorial publié à l'occasion de la manifestation organisée en l'honneur du Lieutenant-Général Baron Baltia* [hereafter, *Eupen-Malmedy et son gouverneur*] (Bruxelles: L'Imprimerie J.E. Goossens, 1923), 127–135.

on Luxembourg, the arrival of a *Bleu-horizon* regiment under Field Marshal Foch in 1917 augured badly for Belgian interests.³⁶ The French Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon, however, agreed to the dispatch of a regiment of Belgian soldiers to Luxembourg under Baltia's command as an act of good faith, demonstrating French support for Belgian intentions. Soldiers of Luxembourg origin were incorporated into this regiment, and ordered to enter the duchy in November 1918.³⁷ On hearing of the decision, Marshal Foch, who proved far less accommodating than his political counterparts in Paris, vetoed the move outright. Hence, the entry of the Belgian regiment had to be abandoned, with Baltia duly returning to Belgium.³⁸

When King Albert made his triumphal entry into Ghent on 12 November 1918, Baltia rode alongside him. By March 1919, he was again promoted, this time to the role of lieutenant general.³⁹ At that stage, it would not have been unusual for Baltia to have taken up an administrative post in Belgian-occupied Germany; this, however, did not happen. Although the war was now at an end, Baltia continued to effect his military duties inside Belgium, taking command of the ninth infantry division stationed at Liège. Throughout 1919, Baltia attended a number of commemorative events at which veterans of the Great War were honoured and presented with the *Croix de Guerre*.⁴⁰ With the sudden departure of Henri Delvaux de Fenffe from the post of High Commissioner of Eupen-Malmedy in August 1919 however, Baltia's career would take a rather unexpected turn.

COLONIAL GOVERNOR OR COMMISSARY DICTATOR?

When Herman Baltia was called to the offices of the Belgian Foreign Ministry in September 1919, Foreign Minister Paul Hymans presented him with a bill creating the office of Royal High Commissioner for Eupen-Malmedy, and invited him to take up the post. Baltia had

³⁶SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/219 Mémoires, Band 1, 210–211.

³⁷Hubert Willems, *Ciney, halte d'un général belge (Baltia) au lendemain de l'Armistice 1918, Contact Patriotique*, 25 (November–December 1987), 7–8.

³⁸SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/X85/219 Mémoires, Band 1, 210–211.

³⁹KL-MRA, Baltia, DP/10898, Arrêté no. 5367, 26 March 1919.

⁴⁰*La Meuse*, 18 December 1918; *La Meuse*, 21 May 1919; *La Meuse*, 16 July 1919.

been recommended by Pierre Nothomb of the Comité de Politique Nationale and by Pierre Van Werveke, who was then Secretary to the Interministerial Commission for Eupen-Malmedy.⁴¹ Baltia was somewhat taken aback by Hyman's offer. He asked that he be allowed to reflect until the following day at least. In the interim, he consulted with his brother-in-law, Stephan Dendal, who cautioned that while the mission was an exciting one, it would at one and the same time not be without its perils. He also sought the opinion of General Sylvian Merchie, *chef de cabinet* at the War Ministry under whom Baltia had served during the war. Merchie insisted that Baltia take up the post 'without hesitation'. The following day, on his way to the Foreign Ministry, he bumped into Pierre Nothomb who cheerily advised Baltia to '[a]ccept with grace!'⁴²

During Baltia's second meeting with Hymans, he was introduced to the Belgian Prime Minister Léon Delacroix. In November of the previous year, Delacroix had been invited by King Albert to assume the office of prime minister and to head a government of national union. The *Union Sacrée* was the result of an initiative by the king following consultations with a number of influential figures who had stayed in Belgium during the occupation. The election of November 1919 had transformed the Belgian political landscape. The POB had performed better than anyone had expected, almost doubling its share of the vote to 36%, which resulted in the party taking seventy seats in parliament. The surge in support for the POB meant that the Catholic Party (*Parti Catholique*) lost its absolute majority, which it had enjoyed for more than thirty years. However, the party still enjoyed more support (38%) and took more seats in parliament than the Socialists. The Liberal vote on the

⁴¹Klaus Pabst, 'Eupen-Malmedy in der belgischen Regierungs- und Parteienpolitik 1914–1940' in *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, 76 (1964), 206–515 (267); Hubert Willems, *Pierre Van Werveke (1893–1952) secrétaire général du gouvernement transitoire d'Eupen-Malmedy (1920–1925)* (1992) [Unpublished], 11.

⁴²Landesarchiv Nordrhein Westfalen (LANRW), Sammlung Baltia, RW/10/5, Erinnerungen des belgischen Generals Baltia, 1918–1922, Gouverneur (Hochkommissar) für die abgetretenen Gebiete Eupen-Malmedy aus seiner Tätigkeit (hereafter, Erinnerungen), 5–6; Els Herrebout, *Generalleutnant Herman Baltia: Memoiren 1920–1925* (Hereafter, Memoiren) (Eupen: Archives générales du Royaume, 2011), 18. Vincent O'Connell, 'Dictating democracy: the impact of Governor Baltia's transitory regime on local government in Eupen-Malmedy', *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies: (The rise and fall of European municipal power since 1800)* (special issue) 7 (2011), 162–187.

other hand had declined by about a third.⁴³ This was the first election in which the concept of universal male suffrage (for men over 21 years) was applied. Of the almost two-million-strong electorate, 12,000 women also cast their votes.⁴⁴ In any event, the most immediate consequence of this form of universal suffrage was an end to the predictability that had defined Belgian politics up to the outbreak of the war.⁴⁵

The purpose of the *Union Sacrée* was to seek a united response to the urgent problems facing post-war Belgium.⁴⁶ Alongside his role as prime minister, Delacroix also accepted the Finance portfolio. In addition to having to come to terms with the human cost of the war, the extent of the financial and material devastation of the country's infrastructure left Delacroix in little doubt that his country was teetering on the edge of the abyss. He told the Belgian parliament on 28 November 1918 that '[...] the problems which the parliament has to resolve externally, in the realm of finance, in the realm of economic restauration, in the realm of food supplies are of such an importance that one may say that country's

⁴³Emmanuel Gerard, 'La démocratie rêvée, bridée et bafouée, 1918–1939', in Michel Dumoulin, Emmanuel Gerard, M. Van den Wijngaert & V. Dujardin, *Nouvelle histoire de Belgique*, (2 vols.) ii: 1905–1950 (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 2006), 53–55.

⁴⁴Women in the main were still prohibited from voting, save for exceptional circumstances. Some categories of women were afforded the right to vote, such as those who had been widowed by the war or mothers who had lost a son in the war and were already widowed. A third category included women who had been condemned by the enemy during the war as a result of their patriotic actions. As Catherine Jacques asserts, it was only women in the third category who truly possessed a personal vote. Women who qualified under the other categories voted in place of their deceased son or husband 'au nom du mort'. This privilege was revoked however, if a woman remarried. Catherine Jacques, *Les féministes belges et les luttes pour l'égalité politique et économique, 1918–1968* (Seraing-le-Château: L'Aurore, 2013).

⁴⁵The vast majority of Belgium's elected deputies had stayed in Belgium during the occupation. However, Belgium was the only belligerent whose government never sat throughout the course of the conflict. The government had been due to meet in November 1914 at the port city of Le Havre in France, but this was cancelled on the insistence of King Albert. Government members were kept up to speed through circulars issued by the Executive. Michel Dumoulin, 'L'entrée dans le xx siècle, 1905–1918', in Michel Dumoulin et al., *Nouvelle histoire de Belgique*, ii, 129.

⁴⁶Carl Henrik Höjer, *Le régime parlementaire belge de 1918 à 1940* (Uppsala & Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1946), 63–68; Gerard, *La démocratie rêvée bridée et bafouée, 1918–1939*, 24–25.

future depends on their resolution.⁴⁷ Although much respected, Delacroix was in essence a compromise candidate behind whom the Catholics, Liberals, and now also the Socialists were uneasily united.⁴⁸

When Baltia arrived at the prime minister's meeting room, Delacroix fixed his eyes on what appeared to him to be a candidate of little enthusiasm. The two men studied each other for a few seconds before Delacroix interjected, 'We need you; we need a general, Catholic and German speaking. Is it in vain that we have made an appeal to your devotion?' This time without hesitation Baltia responded. 'No', he began, 'I have decided to devote all of my efforts to the good of the country, but as a soldier and not as a civilian charged with administering a region.'⁴⁹ Throughout his tenure as governor of Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia would have to deal with allegations from his detractors of heavy-handedness and dictatorial indulgence. Be that as it may, Baltia possessed a fair understanding of his talents as well as his limitations, and was known to be a good delegator. He would otherwise not have wanted to swim where the currents were too strong.

In his memoirs, Baltia claimed to have only later been informed that the position to which he had been appointed had been briefly held, albeit not with full effect, by the governor of Liège and of the devastated regions, Henri Delvaux de Fenffe. This is hard to believe as both de Fenffe and Baltia had met on a number of occasions prior to Baltia's meeting with Delacroix, such as at the reopening of the Université de Liège in May 1919.⁵⁰ To think that the two men would not have discussed their current positions and future prospects is a little difficult to accept. Having become aware of de Fenffe's brief appointment to the post of high commissioner, Baltia was given to understand that the governor of Liège had unnerved his superiors in Brussels by wanting to

⁴⁷Annales Parlementaires Belges (APB), *Chambre*, Léon Delacroix, Belgian Finance Minister, 28 November 1918, 9.

⁴⁸Léon Delacroix (1867–1929) was a lawyer at the *Cour de Cassation* in Brussels. Delacroix served as a local councillor for the Brussels district of Ixelles (1908–1911), and later in parliament as a member of the *Union Catholique* for Namur (1919–1921). He served twice as Prime Minister of Belgium between 1918 and 1920. Following this, he headed the Belgian delegation to the Reparations Commission (1920–1929) until his death in 1929.

⁴⁹Erinnerungen, 0005–0006; Herrebout, *Memoiren* 18–19.

⁵⁰'À l'Université de Liège, la réouverture solennelle', *La Meuse*, 12 May 1919.

create a dynastic administration. In retrospect, it seems that de Fenffe may have been deliberately obstructed in his plans as governor of Eupen-Malmedy out of a fear that he might have proven to be too much his own man.⁵¹ Albeit not the career functionary that de Fenffe was, throughout much of his tenure, Baltia would prove himself more than capable of navigating the process of political and legislative incorporation with the aid of his district commissioners and their assistants, although not without some controversy.

Baltia shared the view held by most Belgians that the country had been betrayed by its erstwhile allies and failed by its leaders at Versailles. He noted how '[T]he Belgians show themselves to be disappointed enough after the *belles promesses* made to them during the war, and which our government was seriously wrong not to act upon'.⁵² He was equally more than a little surprised with the prime minister's rather lax attitude in terms of how the incoming transitory administration was to operate. In his memoirs, Baltia wrote that, following his acceptance of the post of Royal High Commissioner of Eupen-Malmedy, 'Delacroix appeared to have thought no more about giving me directives.' When he queried the prime minister as to what might be expected of his administration in the short term, he received the following response:

See that it goes well and that it doesn't cost too much. When you will have good things to communicate to me, do so. You will be like a colonial governor but a colony directly connected to the Metropolis.⁵³

If such utterances had been made public at the time, this might have severely damaged Baltia's mission in Eupen-Malmedy, or perhaps even called time on it altogether. The idea that Baltia would be seen in this light by the most senior politician in Belgium would not have endeared

⁵¹Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 266–267; *Erinnerungen Baltia*, 0007; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 19.

⁵²*Erinnerungen*, 0008–0009; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 21.

⁵³Pabst, 'Eupen-Malmedy', 267–268; *Erinnerungen Baltia*, 0007–0008; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 19; Christoph Brüll, 'Eupen-Malmedy 1918–1945: Le temps des déchirures' in *Hommage à Henri Bragard, 1877–1944*, collection 'Mémoire wallonne' (13), (Liège: Société de langue et de littérature wallonnes, 2009), 8–9; F. Cremer & W. Miessen, *Spuren: Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens* (Eupen: Werner Miessen, 1996), 9.

the transitory regime to either Walloon or ethnic-German communities. In reality, the administration about to be established in Eupen-Malmedy was not the same as that in place in Belgium's African colonies. In both the Belgian Congo and in Ruanda-Urundi, executive power rested with the king of the Belgians.⁵⁴ Legislative decrees also required the signature of the king. No act emanating from the king would have effect, however, without having been counter-signed by the relevant minister in Brussels. In Eupen-Malmedy this was not the case. Until the implementation of the Belgian legal system, and the termination of the transitory regime, all power rested with Baltia.⁵⁵

Be that as it may, the structure of Baltia's transitory regime resembled in part that of the Belgian colonial model. A group of high-ranking officials under a governor was dependent on a network of district commissioners, their assistants, and lower-level agents to administer the territory. His administration gradually set about peeling back the legislative, administrative and juridical layers of the previous regime. Unlike the Belgian colonial model, however, the chief aim was to empower the local communes to look after their own affairs, and to be largely self-reliant in terms of day-to-day operations and funding. Baltia's provisional government simultaneously attempted to synthesize these strands with those of the Belgian state, albeit conscious of the existing ethnocultural particularities that existed.⁵⁶

Far from reducing the political framework to a *tabula rasa*, Baltia engineered a process of incremental change that involved a synthesis of newly introduced Belgian, and existing German legislation, while at all times taking account of the *droits acquis* (vested interests) of the inhabitants. Although Baltia's role was to facilitate the legislative, administrative and juridical incorporation of the districts into the Belgian state, even the most objective commentator had to concede that as governor of Eupen-Malmedy Baltia enjoyed the most potent form of autocratic power in

⁵⁴Vincent O'Connell, 'Dictating democracy: the impact of governor Baltia's 'dictatorship' on local government in Eupen-Malmedy 1919-1925', *International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* (Special Issue: The rise and fall of European municipal power since 1800) 6 (2) (Spring 2011), 160-192.

⁵⁵Marie Bénédicte Dembour, *Recalling the Belgian Congo: Conversation and Introspection* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), 17-19.

⁵⁶Dembour, *Recalling the Belgian Congo*, 17-23.

Europe at that time.⁵⁷ The extent to which this was the case was best summed up by none other than King Albert, who apparently in an aside to Baltia during one their audiences remarked, 'You have much more authority than me and you have neither Chamber nor Senate.'⁵⁸

Andreas Fickers has referred to the period in the Eastern Cantons under Baltia as the 'colonial phase'.⁵⁹ In spite of the fact that Baltia was equally referred to as both Royal High Commissioner and Governor of Eupen-Malmedy, his role was very much on a par with that of a commissary dictator in the classic sense. In his epic work *Die Diktatur*, published in 1921, and written against the backdrop of political instability and revolutionary fervour in the nascent Weimar Republic, the German political theorist Carl Schmitt discussed the invocation of emergency powers by the state. Schmitt devoted a considerable segment of this work to demystifying the notions around the meaning of dictatorship.⁶⁰ The idea of a commissary dictator dates back to the earliest days of the Roman Republic, and was a mechanism that granted emergency powers to an individual for a limited period of time. The role of the dictator in this sense denoted a state of affairs whereby the extent of the dictatorship was clearly defined within certain temporal and practicable limits. The key feature in such a model of dictatorship necessitated that the dictator return the entity under his control to its former state. This model of dictatorship may be juxtaposed against the sovereign model as formulated by Schmitt. In Schmitt's sovereign model, the state of exception brought about by the suspension of the constitution becomes the rule itself, thus negating a return to the previous arrangement.⁶¹ Schmitt references the work of the Renaissance philosopher and diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli

⁵⁷A.E.M. Dendal, Le rattachement d'Eupen et de Malmédy à la Belgique, *Bulletin Belge des Sciences Militaires*, i (1923), 94–95.

⁵⁸Herman Baltia, *Le Roi Albert*, 91.

⁵⁹Andreas Fickers, De la "Sibérie de la Prusse" aux "cantons rédimés": l'ombre diffuse de la première guerre mondiale dans la mémoire collective des Belges germanophones', in S. Jaumain, M. Amara, B. Majerus, A. Vrints (eds.), *Une guerre totale? La Belgique dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: Nouvelle tendances de la recherche historique* (Bruxelles: Archives Générales du Royaume, 2005), 615–633 (616).

⁶⁰Carl Schmitt, *Dictatorship: From the Origin of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to Proletarian Class Struggle* (Michael Hoelzl & Graham Ward, trans.) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 1–6.

⁶¹Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Kevin Attell, trans.) (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.

and his interpretation of dictatorship. Machiavelli did not understand dictatorship in terms of absolute government, but rather instead as 'an instrument to guarantee freedom'. Machiavelli's dictator was, however, beyond the influence of other bodies, and was thus free to implement his will without fear of limitation by supplementary laws.⁶² Schmitt also invoked the French jurist and Enlightenment philosopher Jean Bodin's distinction between dictatorship and sovereignty. Where sovereignty is described by Bodin as 'the absolute and perpetual power of a republic', whether exercised by the people or by a prince or leader, a dictator is 'neither a prince nor sovereign magistrate' but one commissioned by the sovereign to accomplish certain tasks.⁶³ Bodin added that the dictator's powers are in this way 'neither absolute nor perpetual'.⁶⁴

Absolutist monarchs often relied on the services of commissary dictators. This form of dictatorship, Schmitt argued, was necessary when the status quo was endangered. The commissary dictator could suspend or amend certain aspects of the constitution or existing legislation. However, he could not abrogate existing laws from the statute books. In essence, the commissary dictator suspended the constitution only until such time that the exceptional circumstances had been surmounted and any danger to the state had passed. As Schmitt points out, although invested with extra-constitutional powers by the sovereign (in the case of Herman Baltia, by King Albert and the Belgian government), the commissary dictator 'remains nevertheless a direct tool of the concrete and alien will of someone else'.⁶⁵

It is necessary here, however, to highlight a number of peculiarities with regard to the 'commissarial' function as applied to Herman Baltia. At the inception of Baltia's regime, the territory of Eupen-Malmedy did not form part of the Belgian state, and its annexation by Belgium had

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Gigoris Ananiadis, 'Carl Schmitt and Max Adler: the irreconcilability of politics', in Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London & New York: Verso, 1999), 118–137 (123).

⁶⁴Schmitt, *Dictatorship*, 21; George Schwab, *The Challenge of the Exception: An Introduction to the Political Ideas of Carl Schmitt between 1921–1936* (2nd ed.) (New York & London, 1989), 30; Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Four Chapters from the Six Books of the Commonwealth* (Julian H. Franklin, ed. & trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–4.

⁶⁵Schmitt, *Dictatorship*, 29.

yet to be fully endorsed by the League of Nations. Hence the same criteria needed to create a state of exception as formulated by Schmitt did not exist. Neither was there a suspension of the Belgian constitution, as Baltia's position and that of the Eupen-Malmedy government was extra-constitutional. More importantly, neither was there a suspension of German law in the border districts. Instead, Baltia undertook a process of replacing German legislation with Belgian law, taking account of the *droits acquis* of the inhabitants.

Although without the facility, or perhaps encumbrance, of an upper or lower house, Baltia could nevertheless avail of the services of a superior council to which he could refer during the preparation of decrees. That said, he informed King Albert in a rather self-assured manner that this body would perform merely 'a consultative role [...] thus avoiding long discussions and permitting quick solutions to the problems at hand'. Baltia's intentions for the superior council were much more restrictive than those of his predecessor, who had intended it to be far more engaged in the daily affairs of the districts.⁶⁶ From the outset, Baltia intended introducing only the bare minimum of Belgian officials and functionaries into his administration, so as 'not to give the impression that all vacancies were reserved for Belgians and none for Belgium's new subjects'.⁶⁷ After all, the perception which Brussels was eager to create was that of an autocratic regime being replaced by a democratic and egalitarian one. Thus, while there was little doubt that Baltia would make full use of the extensive powers granted to him, most of the functionaries were to be left in their positions, allowing them to be confident in the possibility of advancement under his regime. That said, retention of one's position was impossible if one failed to swear the oath of allegiance to the Belgian state and its king. In doing so, one swore to 'undertake, in honor and conscience, to fulfill my service obligations, as I have done so far, true and honestly, and conscientiously obey the orders of the High Commissioner'.⁶⁸ Following de Fenffe's earlier recommendation, the superior council was to comprise twelve members.

⁶⁶Baltia, *Le Roi Albert*, 91.

⁶⁷AAEB, 10.792/II/66, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Léon Delacroix, 26 October 1919.

⁶⁸AMAEB, 10.792/I/66, Text of the oath of allegiance, Malmedy, 1 February 1920, which had to be taken by all public officials. Failure to do so would prohibit them from remaining in the service of the Belgian state.

Six members were to be chosen from inside Belgium, having been nominated by the prime minister. The remaining six were chosen by Baltia, and would be drawn from a cross-section of the locality. These members of the superior council were expected to provide the means of 'testing popular sentiment'.⁶⁹

Until such time as Germany had signed the Versailles Treaty, Baltia was unable to assume office in Malmedy. In the meantime, he installed himself in offices at the rue du Commerce in Brussels, which had previously housed the Russian legation. There he had at his disposal the services of Paesmans from the Finance Ministry, and a *chef de bureau* in the person of Ernst Lafontaine. A structure had already been put in place under de Fenffe that aimed to go some way to establishing liens between the administration in Eupen-Malmedy and the corresponding ministries in Brussels. The director general of this mechanism, Paesmans, presented Baltia with a plan, which he expected Baltia would deliver upon once in office. But an irritated Baltia 'put the plan in a drawer and it stayed there'. In this way, he began his new role as he meant to continue. He was to be his own man. He had been invested with full legislative and executive powers, and whether he was looked upon as a colonial governor, or a commissary dictator, he intended to use them.⁷⁰

RELATIONS WITH BRUSSELS

The drive to recruit administrative staff from the government departments in Brussels was proving to be a much harder task than it first appeared. Ideally, by the end of the regime these recruits were to return to their respective government departments, but would continue to be on hand to advise on future government policy in Eupen-Malmedy. Nobody knew just how long the regime was going to last, and this in

⁶⁹AAEB, 10.792/II/66, Eupen-Malmedy, Royal High Commissioner for Eupen-Malmedy Herman Baltia to Belgian Prime Minister Léon Delacroix, 26 October 1919; 'Proclamation', 10 January 1920' (delivered on 11 January 1920) in Haut-Commissariat Royal Gouvernement Eupen-Malmedy, Recueil des décrets, arêtes et avis, i, 10 Janvier–10 Juillet 1920 (Nos. 1–84 & 501–528) (hereafter, Recueil i (Stavelot: Imprimerie de la Warche 1920), 1.

⁷⁰No copy or extract from Paesmans' plan is known to exist. LANRW, RW/10/5, Erinnerungen, 0008; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 20.

itself was a stumbling block to recruitment. Furthermore, a general ignorance of the socio-political environment that prevailed in Eupen-Malmedy meant that many would-be recruits were reluctant to venture beyond the safety of Brussels.⁷¹

Baltia was particularly vexed by what he described as the 'menace and corruption' being practised by various ministries in Brussels, and their attempts to obstruct his recruitment process. As well as this, there seemed to be little urgency among the political elite towards the unfolding situation in Eupen-Malmedy in advance of the popular consultation (public expression of opinion). A disagreement between Baltia and Belgium's Socialist Minister for Justice Émile Vandervelde presents just one example of how '*l'ancienne Belgique*' was unwilling to acknowledge wholeheartedly its responsibilities towards '*la nouvelle Belgique*', failing to move beyond the rhetoric of carefully worded government statements.⁷² Baltia had been struggling to hold on to essential personnel sent to him from various government departments in Brussels. The minefield of German legislation that had to be revoked and replaced by Belgian law was an onerous and painstaking endeavour with which only the brightest and most committed legal minds could be trusted. His chief advisor on matters of justice sent to him through Paesmans was Herbert Godefroid, a functionary in the Justice Department. Godefroid had proven himself more than capable of interpreting the German legal code, which was still in place in the two districts.⁷³

In Godefroid, together with his colleague Pierre Van Werveke, a lawyer from Ghent, Baltia possessed two highly effective functionaries. Van Werveke would come to play an increasingly influential role throughout the transitory period. Baltia's trouble with the Justice Ministry began

⁷¹Erinnerungen, 11; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 24.

⁷²Émile Vandervelde (1866–1938) headed Belgium's socialist movement for almost fifty years. Vandervelde was an accomplished academic and the author of numerous works of sociological, economic, political and biological interest, having first studied medicine at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*. He had been instrumental in spearheading a campaign to end the brutal and exploitative regime in the Congo under Leopold II, and wrote some important works on Belgian policy there. He formed part of Belgium's delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, and served in a number of ministerial posts throughout his eventful political career, including Justice, Foreign Affairs, Health, and as a cabinet minister without portfolio. Janet Polasky, 'Vandervelde' in *Nouvelle Biographie Nationale*, i (Bruxelles: Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 1988), 344–354.

⁷³LANRW, RW/10/5, *Erinnerungen Baltia*, 11–12.

when he insisted that Godefroid set up his residence in Malmedy, and not in Brussels, where he feared he would be 'absorbed by the workload in the Ministry of Justice'.⁷⁴ It would seem that Baltia's mistrust of the political machinery in Brussels had not altered since before the war. The Justice Minister Vandervelde demanded that Godefroid return to Brussels immediately. However, an irate Baltia blankly refused, citing that Godefroid was his sole juridical advisor and had become very well acquainted with his brief; besides, Vandervelde could choose from any number of capable individuals in Brussels. Initially, it seemed that Vandervelde had relented. Within a few days, however, he again wrote to Baltia, demanding once more the return of Godefroid to Brussels. Baltia argued that he could not release Godefroid as no replacement had been put in place. In any case, there was no sense in removing such a key functionary prior to the completion of his task. Invoking a precedent between the War Minister and the Colonial Minister, who refused the latter's demand for the return of an officer serving in the Congo, Baltia as head of Belgium's other 'colony', to paraphrase Delacroix, was in a similar fashion unwilling to give ground. Godefroid eventually came to Baltia alleging that his superiors in the Justice Ministry had made it known to him that if he did not return to Brussels 'immediately', his prospects of promotion would be blocked. If he returned, it was promised that he would enjoy the same pecuniary advantages available to him in Malmedy. After a few days of reflection, Godefroid returned to Brussels claiming it was due to illness. However, before long it was clear that the young functionary would not be returning to Malmedy.⁷⁵

Vandervelde, in common with his colleagues in the POB, was not a supporter of the annexation, in spite of the fact that he had served with Paul Hymans as a member of the Belgian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. Therefore, his reluctance to co-operate with what he and other socialist deputies would later describe as a 'dictatorial regime' was

⁷⁴AAEB, 10.792/II/1654, Eupen-Malmedy, Royal High Commissioner Baltia to Prime Minister Léon Delacroix, 9 February 1920; AAEB, 10.792/II 850, Eupen-Malmedy, Commissaire de District Schnorrenberg to Léopold Villers, Bourgmestre de Malmedy, 13 January 1920.

⁷⁵Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 268.

not all that surprising.⁷⁶ Baltia had little time for such interference from government ministries, whatever the reasoning behind it.

Another controversial case involving Daniel Warnotte, the Chef de Bureau at the Labour Ministry, exposes the degree of mutual mistrust between Baltia and Brussels. Warnotte sent an instruction to the director of the social insurance bureau in Malmedy forbidding the payment of maternal benefits. On hearing of the instruction, Baltia quickly responded by demanding that Adolphe Schnorrenberg, the recently appointed district commissioner in Malmedy, impress upon the *bourgmestre* that in any similar situation in the future 'no instruction was to be observed if it had not emanated from the Royal High Commissioner'.⁷⁷ Baltia later wrote to Prime Minister Delacroix, having been informed by him that Warnotte had lodged a complaint against him. Baltia was typically forthright in his reply to the prime minister, asking:

Is it not rather I who should have the right to be annoyed? Mr Warnotte's tendency is to wish to take on an authority here which does not belong to him, and to show himself to be irked when one does not follow him.⁷⁸

In spite of such antagonisms and what he understood as attempts to undermine his authority, Baltia soon succeeded in organizing a complete cadre of senior functionaries known as *chefs de service*, and paired them with their respective departments in Brussels. These *chefs de service* had the competences of corresponding ministries in 'old Belgium' and were, as Baltia put it, his 'technical advisors'. As with the superior council, however, their advice need not be taken. In total, twelve departments were established, which included Finance, the Interior, Agriculture, Science

⁷⁶APB, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 855–256; *Le Soir*, 5 Mar. 1925; AAEB, 10.792/I/55, E. de Gaiffier, Entrevue entre les ministres belges et français du 30 Juillet 1926, à 2 heures de l'après-midi, 7 August 1926, 3.

⁷⁷AAEB, 10.792/II/850, Eupen-Malmedy, Schnorrenberg to Villers, 13 January 1920. Schnorrenberg was appointed district commissioner for Malmedy in August 1919 prior to Baltia's appointment. He immediately set about to dilute pro-German influence in the district. Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 276.

⁷⁸AAEB, 10.792/II/1654, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Delacroix, 9 February 1920; Warnotte to Fechir, 7 January 1920; AAEB, 10.792/II/785, Eupen-Malmedy, Émile Vandervelde, Belgian Justice Minister to Baltia, 3 February 1920.

and Arts, Railways, Postal, Telegraph and Telephone, Environment, Industry and Labour, Economic Affairs, Justice and Military Pensions.⁷⁹ The cabinet was comprised of both civilian and military personnel, and was complemented by a general secretariat and a translation department.

Pierre Van Werveke, who up to that point was *adjoint* to Senator Halot at the Transport Commission in Aachen, was appointed secretary general of the Eupen-Malmedy Government. Baltia's choice of Van Werveke for such an important role was a recognition of the latter's tenacity and patriotic credentials. During the war, as a student at the University of Louvain, Van Werveke had been complicit in producing and disseminating anti-German tracts, particularly via the Belgian newspaper *La Libre Belgique*. Arrested in April 1916, he was imprisoned for a number of months. He later worked for a period of time at the *Office Central Belge pour les Prisonniers* and was later attaché to the Belgian Legation in Bern.⁸⁰

Baltia had insisted from the outset that Van Werveke be at his disposal in an advisory capacity on all aspects regarding the Treaty of Versailles. To this end, a bureau was put in place to concern itself specifically with the application of the treaty. Major Daufresne de la Chevalerie was appointed vice-governor, in effect taking on the responsibilities akin to that of an interior minister, overseeing and co-ordinating the functions of the various *chefs de service*. All *chefs de service* had to submit a monthly report to the vice-governor highlighting any issues concerning their respective areas of responsibility. All these would then be compiled into a report for the governor's attention. Each department had also to submit accounts of their operations to the vice-governor. It was, however, stipulated that the ministries in Brussels were not allowed to have direct contact with their corresponding number in the Eupen-Malmedy

⁷⁹ *Eupen-Malmedy et son gouverneur*, 137.

⁸⁰ Pierre Van Werveke (1893–1952) was born in Ghent. His father was an adviser to the *Cour de Cassation*. He was a lawyer, but also worked for some time as a journalist with *La Libre Belgique* newspaper. Following the German invasion of 1940, he was arrested on account of his suspected anti-German activities. He was eventually released, and fled to Brussels where after the war he worked as a lawyer at the Cour d'Appel. He was later made a justice, and sat in Eupen where he also assumed the role of president of the Elektrizitätsgesellschaft. Gerard Kleu, *Die Neuordnung der ostkantone Belgiens 1945–1956: Politik, Kultur und Wirtschaft in Eupen, Malmedy und St. Vith* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2007), 25; Hubert Willems, *Pierre Van Werveke (1893–1952) secrétaire général du gouvernement transitoire d'Eupen-Malmedy (1920–1925)* (Bruxelles, 1992) [Unpublished], 1.

government. Any such correspondence had to be directed through the office of the high commissioner himself or through his *chef de cabinet*. In this way, Baltia aimed to ensure that members of his government were not used by Brussels to undermine his position, as had happened in the past.⁸¹ Baltia also wanted the receipts from the railway service in Eupen-Malmedy to be accounted for on a separate footing from those of the Belgian state. The Transport Ministry however was anxious that in order to simplify matters the railway lines of Eupen and Malmedy should form part of the overall Belgian rail network. On this occasion, Baltia's intentions were most definitely derailed.⁸²

BALTIA'S PROCLAMATION

Baltia was convinced that in order to start things off on a strong footing a charter needed to be introduced, which would guarantee the rights of the population while outlining the benefits accruing from the attainment of Belgian citizenship, as Belgian law was not as yet in force in the territory. With the assistance of a number of his legal advisors, he devised a proclamation printed in both French and German, which in effect was a people's charter aimed at, among other things, assuaging the fears of an anxious populace about the future that awaited them. Even so, the proclamation's wording seemed at once to offend and confuse a certain segment of the population. While the inclusion of the term *frères retrouvés* made sense to those in the Walloon community, its German derivative '*wiedergefundene Brüder*' made little sense, and was frowned upon by a substantial number of the inhabitants.⁸³ Baltia had previously submitted a draft version of his proclamation to both the Belgian prime minister and the foreign minister. The prime minister's copy came back the following day 'void of deletions or observations'. The foreign minister asked Baltia to contact a young *attaché* to the cabinet, who asked if Baltia would not mind changing 'one or two words'.⁸⁴ Perhaps this was

⁸¹ *Recueil*, i, Décret 3 i.4, 'L'Administration centrale du Haut-Commissaire du Roi, Gouverneur des Territoires d'Eupen et de Malmédy' & Décret 3 vi. 28, 9, 5–6.

⁸² AAEB, 10.792/II/649, Eupen-Malmedy, Ministère des Chemins de Fer, Marine, Postes et Télégraphes to Baltia, 22 February 1920.

⁸³ Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 280.

⁸⁴ LANRW, RW/10/5, Erinnerungen Baltia, 15; Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 279.

proof of Brussels' confidence in Baltia, or maybe a telling example of the lack of concern in government circles as to how Baltia was executing his mission.

The proclamation contained seven articles, the first six of which outlined the administrative structure of the transitory government. The seventh article was divided into fourteen points (perhaps Baltia may have taken his cue from President Wilson), which recommended to the people of Eupen-Malmedy the benefits of becoming Belgian. The preamble to Baltia's fourteen points stated:

You occupy a privileged position in the world, since apart from the advantages offered to you by Germany you will have all those accorded to Belgium by the Allies. Your compatriots open their arms to you, and will treat you as brothers. Go to them with confidence.⁸⁵

Each of the fourteen points in Article 7 dealt with a specific area of the transitory government's policy, from assuring the inhabitants that their rights would be respected, and that both German and French languages would be on an even footing, to promising that 'whatever their social position, opinions or aspirations they would be free to air their wishes and complaints'.⁸⁶ Freedom of religion and of expression as stipulated in Article 14 of the Belgian constitution were equally to be enjoyed by the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy.⁸⁷

The area of education was to remain virtually unchanged, at least in the short term. However, incremental changes would be introduced with the aim of preparing the young school-going population to graduate to Belgian universities as opposed to those in Germany. This would be an essential plank of Baltia's assimilationist programme. As well as this, the rights of workers were also addressed in Article 7 of the proclamation. Aimed particularly at the young male population, the proclamation promised that military service was to be dispensed with in the region for a period of four years. Those ex-servicemen wounded during the war would enjoy the same benefits as those offered to their Belgian counterparts. A special effort was also to be made to ensure the return home of

⁸⁵'Proclamation' in *Recueil*, i, 2.

⁸⁶Preamble to the Proclamation and article vii. 14, *Recueil*, i, 1.

⁸⁷Proclamation, article vii. 2. *Recueil*, i, 2.

any remaining prisoners of war. In addition, all military tribunals put in place by the armies of occupation were to be henceforth suppressed.⁸⁸

In keeping with such admirable aspirations, Baltia wished to rid the administrative apparatus in the districts of what he described as 'incompetent individuals, the intemperate and the lazy'. The proclamation furthermore spoke of the need for an open and transparent administration devoid of what Baltia termed *cloisons étanchés* (impenetrable compartments)—no doubt a reference to the opaque form of politics that he believed characterized the nature of governance in both Brussels and Berlin.⁸⁹

Having formulated the proclamation, Baltia decided to convene an interministerial commission in his temporary offices at 111 rue du Commerce in Brussels. The proceedings were to emphasize the importance of studying German law presently in place in Eupen-Malmedy.⁹⁰ However, only half the government departments sent representatives. The lack of enthusiasm from central government at once surprised and irked the governor designate. Nestor Crahay, then director general at the *Département des eaux et forêts*, was one of those who did attend, and was first to speak. According to Baltia's account of the commission's proceedings, Crahay began by crediting himself with being the principal author of the annexation. In the version of events presented by Baltia, Crahay claimed that it was his report on the devastation of Belgian forests by the Germans that had determined the government to declare 'the retrocession' of the two districts. While castigating the German methods of forestry, Crahay then proceeded to show how he intended to organize the territory to better exploit its potential for the Belgian state. Baltia remained unimpressed. He understood from his own experience that the Germans were extremely efficient in managing their forests. He 'did not want to allow himself to be lectured by the central administrations'. Furthermore, he preferred to remain free of the restrictions of Brussels bureaucracy, and of functionaries whom he believed had 'little understanding' of the problems at hand.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Proclamation, vii. 8–13, in *Recueil*, i, 3–4.

⁸⁹ AAEB, 10.792/II/66, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Belgian Prime Minister Léon Delacroix, 26 October 1919.

⁹⁰ LANRW, RW/10/5, Erinnerungen Baltia, 20.

⁹¹ AAEB, 10.192/II, Eupen-Malmedy, Séance, 26 October 1919.

The Agriculture Ministry was represented at the meeting by the chief veterinary inspector, De Roo, whose rather rambling account of the veterinary situation in Eupen-Malmedy was more than Baltia could bear. Already frustrated by what he understood to be a less than committed involvement by Brussels, Baltia abruptly interrupted a rather surprised De Roo mid-sentence, and asked that he forward him a written report instead.⁹² On leaving the meeting, one of the representatives from Brussels was heard to say, 'He treats us a little arrogantly this soldier, but he will soon realise that he needs us, if not he will come to grief.'⁹³

Apart from the departmental link with Brussels, Baltia sought to co-opt local functionaries who, he thought, would be useful in gaining a much-needed insight into the physical and mental landscape of the region, not least in terms of assessing the public mood towards the regime. Noting the 'diverse elements' putting themselves at his disposal, Baltia knew that he could not be too careful in his methods of recruitment. Or, as he wrote in his first report to the Belgian prime minister, 'We recognized immediately the necessity of sounding them out'.⁹⁴ The process whereby Belgian functionaries would be mixing with locally sourced agents needed to be organized in such a way that a common blueprint could be established. Candidates coming from Brussels were put through a rigorous round of interviews, and called back on numerous occasions. They then had to be 'acclimatized' before being appointed to their respective departments. All this took time. These interviews were held in Aachen in the Belgian zone of occupation. Within a few weeks, the Brussels functionaries began to arrive in Malmedy. A considerable effort would be required to acquaint them with the existing German legislation, and to ensure that it be 'cleansed of all the laws of exception introduced during the Great War and at the time of the armistice'.⁹⁵

Baltia himself vacated the offices at the rue du Commerce in Brussels and headed to Aachen, where he intended to study the various special ordinances issued by the IARHC. It also afforded him a chance to sense

⁹²LANRW, RW/10/5, *Erinnerungen Baltia*, 23; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 31–32.

⁹³LANRW, RW/10/5, *Erinnerungen Baltia*, 23–24; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 32.

⁹⁴SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/191, *Haut-Commissariat Royal d'Eupen-Malmedy*, *Rapport sur l'activité générale du Gouvernement d'Eupen et de Malmedy (hereafter, Rapport sur l'activité, i)*, 4.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 4–5.

the mood on the ground in Eupen and Malmedy. While in Aachen, Baltia made several trips across the border to both districts. He was welcomed to Aachen by General Michel, who arranged for his accommodation in the offices of the *Altes Kurhaus*. During a meeting between the two men, General Michel suggested to Baltia that the Belgian fourth zone of occupation be divided into three subzones. Eupen-Malmedy would in this way form the third subzone. As a result, Baltia would fall under Michel's authority. Baltia was keen to stress the independence of his position and duly rejected Michel's proposals. He later wrote how 'General Michel had aspirations to the position of Royal High Commissioner and wanted to eliminate me'.⁹⁶

Malmedy was eventually chosen as the location for the headquarters of the transitory government. The choice of Malmedy over Eupen was based on a number of factors. The building in which the headquarters of *Landrat* von Korff was located appealed more to Baltia than those of its counterpart in Eupen. It was envisaged that the building would house most of the government departments, as well as his private living accommodation. Malmedy appeared more suitable also as it was centrally located within the territory, at the heart of the Walloon community. During his initial visits, he met with the recently installed *bourgmestre* of Malmedy, Léopold Villers, as well as the military commander for the district, Major Daufresne de la Chevalerie, and his *adjoint*, Count de Prêt de Calesberg. Calesberg had headed a small Belgian military mission in Malmedy while it was under British occupation. Baltia offered the position of *chef de cabinet* to Daufresne, and asked Prêt de Calesberg to continue his role of liaison with the foreign ministry.⁹⁷

General Daufresne soon informed *Landrat* von Korff that unlike Hyslop he would not tolerate the slightest instance of German propaganda, and that he expected him to maintain order in the district. He noted that in general the Prussian functionaries performed their tasks in an 'irreproachable' manner. Yet some, such as the former *Bürgermeister* Kalpers, wished to avoid the 'disgrace' of having to receive the commander of the district [*cercle*] and duly retired, handing over his functions to Villers.⁹⁸ Baltia's transitory regime came into existence on 10 January 1920 with the coming into force of the Versailles Treaty.

⁹⁶ LANRW, RW/10/5, Erinnerungen Baltia, 0008; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 20.

⁹⁷ Erinnerungen, 11; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 22–23.

⁹⁸ Rapport sur l'activité, i, 9.

That morning, Delacroix telephoned Baltia to inform him that the Germans had signed the Treaty, thus bringing to an end an anxious period of uncertainty for the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy, whether German or Walloon.

On the steps of the *Hôtel de Ville* in Malmedy the following day, Baltia read aloud the proclamation, which he believed ensured that the essence of Belgian law would be maintained in its absence. He later repeated the exercise in Eupen, reading the proclamation first in French and then in German.⁹⁹ While in Malmedy, Baltia met with *Landrat* von Korff, whom he adjudged to have 'cried some crocodile tears without giving reasons for his chagrin'. Baltia informed von Korff that he would have to vacate his office with immediate effect. Von Korff, however, requested a period of fifteen days' grace to organize his departure, which was eventually granted. In the meantime, the government in waiting set up temporary offices in the nearby town of Stavelot.¹⁰⁰ During his sojourn in Stavelot, Baltia resided at the *Hôtel Gentin*. Each morning, he made his way to Malmedy, where he would meet with local functionaries, 'at least those who allowed me to get to know them better'. The offices of the *Landrat*, which had only been built in 1912, although ideal for the seat of government, proved insufficient to accommodate the needs of every department.¹⁰¹ Senior aides thus hastily preoccupied themselves with logistical matters, which included seeking out suitable lodgings for the boarding of functionaries. The old premises of the *Hôtel Central* were also acquired, as well as premises owned by the *Dresdner Bank*. The bank's director in Malmedy approached Baltia, and asked if his business would be allowed to operate under the new regime. Baltia responded that soon Belgian banks would be installed in the district, and that the *Dresdner Bank* 'would not be able to count on my protection'.¹⁰²

In Eupen, Baltia met with *Landrat* von Kessler, who rather unexpectedly pleaded with Baltia to be allowed to serve 'under the sceptre of King Albert', for whom he had 'the greatest regard'. In any event, he had no appetite for serving under a republic, and if he could not serve

⁹⁹Erinnerungen, 15; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 27–30.

¹⁰⁰Erinnerungen, 25; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 37.

¹⁰¹Pierre Moxhet, 'Le palais du gouvernement de la Landratur au centre des finances' in *Malmedy Folklore*, 60 (2003–2005), 283–295 (285); *La Semaine*, 6 July 1912.

¹⁰²Erinnerungen, 26; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 37.

the Belgian king then he was going to retire. The *Landrat's* confession that he would rather serve under a Belgian king than under a German republic was in line with the opinion of many inhabitants who had previously indicated similar sentiments to Xhaflaire. Baltia, however, refused von Kessler's request, and as with von Korff, he was given fifteen days to prepare his departure. Although Baltia thought von Kessler to be genuine and well intentioned, he refused to reconsider his decision, fearing that if he held on to him he would also have to retain von Korff. Such a move would have been anathema to Baltia, and an insult to the pro-Belgian elements in Malmedy who eagerly looked forward to von Korff's departure. Léon Xhaflaire was to replace von Kessler in the new role of district commissioner of Eupen, whilst Schnorrenberg in Malmedy took over from von Korff. All the *Landrats'* subordinates now also fell under the authority of the Eupen-Malmedy government. Henceforth, if either *Landrat* wished to convey anything to his subordinates, he would now have to do so through Baltia's functionaries.¹⁰³

Prior to his arrival in Eupen, Baltia had given advance word to the local curate that he and his officials wished to be received at the door of St Nikolas, the main church in the town. Well aware of the loaded symbolism of such a gesture, the curate responded that he could not accede to the governor's wishes, as such ceremonies were only reserved for 'princes of the Church'. When Baltia's office responded that they were representatives of the Belgian king, they were met with a similar reply. When the same indulgence was demanded by written decree, the measure was honoured 'without objection'.¹⁰⁴ Baltia later wrote of such inconveniences: '[W]hen we encountered such resistance, we would have recourse to the order, and it always produced the same magic.' Hence the German trait of conforming to discipline, which Baltia firmly believed was inherent in the German psyche, was very much in evidence in Eupen. But it would be necessary, he thought, to show them that there may exist a type of discipline that excludes '*la rudesse*' but which inspires '*la confiance*', discipline he termed as being truly consented.¹⁰⁵ That said, he ensured he had sufficient force at his disposal in case things got out of control.

¹⁰³Erinnerungen, 24–25; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 35.

¹⁰⁴Rapport sur l'activité, i, 6.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 6.

The Belgian troops stationed in the barracks at Eupen and Malmedy, including the fortress at Elsenborn, fell under Baltia's authority following the coming into force of the Versailles Treaty. As late as April 1920, he had to remind the Defence Ministry in Brussels of this fact.¹⁰⁶ These troops were composed of those already stationed in 'old Belgium', and whose terms of service were regularly rotated. Eupen and Malmedy were each to contain one infantry battalion backed up by three infantry companies, and one company of machine-gunners (*mitrailleurs*). No members of the serving Belgian army of occupation were expected to serve in Eupen-Malmedy once Baltia had taken charge, except for a small contingent from the music corps. Prior to taking office, Baltia made a request to the War Ministry that a regiment of the army of occupation in Eupen be withdrawn. This was as much a practical suggestion as it was a recognition by Baltia of the need to present at the earliest possible opportunity a semblance of normality and the demilitarization of daily life.

A total of 168 gendarmes was employed to police the territory. Twenty-five were stationed in Malmedy, whilst twenty-nine took up their posts in Eupen. The other small towns and villages, such as Waimes and Bullingen, averaged around five gendarmes, while Elsenborn counted fourteen. At first, the people of the region displayed a certain apprehension towards their new police force, which was 'completely natural', Baltia thought.¹⁰⁷ The new recruits were urged above all to be tactful in their dealings with locals. After all, Baltia noted, 'our mission was not to master these people but to win them to our side'. Before long it became obvious that the gendarmerie had begun to gain the people's trust. The various instruments of law and order were also busy dealing with local complaints from trespassing to poaching. In the district of Malmedy alone the courts dealt with 1096 cases from January to July. Most of these concerned infractions against the various *arrêtés* and *décrets* issued by the Eupen-Malmedy government, such as hunting and fishing without a licence. However, no serious crimes were registered.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶KL-MRA, DB/10898, F. Masson, Belgian War Minister to Chef d'État Major de l'Armée Belge, 8 December 1919; M317, Baltia to the Belgian Defence Minister, 4 April 1920; A/2384, Belgian Defence Ministry to Belgian Prime Minister and Belgian Interior Minister, 10 November 1921.

¹⁰⁷Rapport sur l'activité, i, 151.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

Finding accommodation for the army proved a constant source of agitation for the new administration. Only two barracks—one at Recht and another at Manderfeld—were fully constructed. None of the property owners wished to lease or rent their buildings, and would only consider a full sale. The real problem lay in the reluctance of the Belgian authorities to commit in any way to such transactions before the final ratification on the future of the territory by the League of Nations. Brussels was not going to invest any more of its scarce financial resources until the districts were definitively ceded to Belgium. This would only come about following the successful conclusion of the public expression of opinion.¹⁰⁹

Finally, on Thursday 22 January, Baltia and his entourage entered Malmedy.¹¹⁰ After a passing-out parade, the group made their way to the *Hôtel de Ville* where they were met by local dignitaries. A monument to the fallen of the war of 1870, which dominated the Place de Rome in the centre of Malmedy, had already been encased behind timber as it was deemed to have 'insulted [the] army by its presence'.¹¹¹ Out of sight may well have been out of mind for any pro-Belgians who celebrated with their newly arrived governor. Following an exchange of formalities, Baltia's entourage made its way to the local parish church of St Quirin, followed by a growing throng of dignitaries and curious spectators. There to welcome them at the door was the local curate (*curé*), Jules Scheffen. Scheffen's initial attempt to greet the governor was somewhat skewed by his comment that '[o]ne cannot in the same day love that which one has spurned, and spurn that which one has adored'. It seemed to an irritated Baltia that the *curé* could barely disguise his reluctance in welcoming him to his church. Scheffen insisted to Baltia, however, that 'we shall fulfill our duties as we must', and made it quite clear that 'we shall respect authority, and that we promise we shall render to Cesar

¹⁰⁹At Versailles, Belgium was allocated 2.15 billion dollars in reparations from Germany. In time, Belgium would receive barely one-sixth of this amount in real terms. Lynn Case & John C. Engelsman, 'Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands', in Joseph S. Roueck (ed.), *Contemporary Europe: A Study of National, International, Economic and Cultural Trends* (Norwood, Mass.: D. Van Nostrand Company Inc.: 1941), 157–190 (160).

¹¹⁰The National Archives (TNA), FO/371, Belgium, 3644/B/53, F.H. Villiers to Earl Curzon, 23 January 1920.

¹¹¹'Une journée historique', *La Meuse*, 24 January 1920.

what is Cesar's, and for certain to God what is God's'.¹¹² Baltia was, however, surprised by the curate's frankness, as one who having faithfully served his God and his Kaiser, was now, in common with his congregation, expected to transfer that loyalty to a new monarch, and to a new state. In his report to the prime minister, Baltia described Scheffen's attitude as typical of the passive yet hostile approach of the clergy in the region, something which would become an all-too-familiar characteristic throughout the following months.

What Baltia interpreted as a display of hostility from Scheffen was no more than the manifestation of the sense of foreboding felt not only among the clergy, but among its congregation also. Scheffen was neither anti- nor pro-Belgian. He was in many respects a prime example of the complex individual that emerges from such a contested border territory, with its labyrinthine historical and cultural layers, and concerned only for the welfare of his immediate congregation.¹¹³ Following the rather clumsy encounter between Baltia and Scheffen, a *Te Deum* was sung in the church, allowing the new governor a chance to gather his thoughts. In any event, Baltia's brush with Scheffen did not put too much of a dent on the proceedings, as festivities followed and speeches were made in honour of Belgium's king and queen at the *Hôtel du Gouvernement*.¹¹⁴ Those in attendance were treated to an eclectic display of local sporting, musical and choral talent from around Malmedy. In his first report to the Belgian prime minister, Baltia attested how during that day the town of Malmedy seemed overcome by the possibilities which this new dawn seemed to promise. Houses were bedecked in the black,

¹¹²Erinnerungen Baltia, 25; Herrebut, *Memoiren*, 35–36.

¹¹³Scheffen was born in Prussian Malmedy in the village of Walk in 1864. He later studied theology at the University of Bonn and was ordained in 1891. Scheffen served as a curate in Germany up to 1907 when he was unexpectedly transferred to Malmedy. He enjoyed a very good relationship with von Korff, who had arrived in Malmedy in 1907. With the outbreak of the war, relations between the two men became strained. Many thousands of German servicemen and functionaries were continually billeted in Malmedy on their way to the Front. With the outlawing of the French language by von Korff, the practice whereby Scheffen would alternate between French and German whilst saying mass brought him into conflict with the authorities. The Archbishop of Cologne supported Scheffen on that occasion, but the matter was only resolved following the defeat of Germany and the evacuation of the Kaiser's forces from Malmedy. Raymond Jacob, 'Le petit Jules', *Malmedy Folklore*, 60 (2003–2005), 104–113 (105–107).

¹¹⁴This was the official name for the seat of the provisional government.

yellow and red of Belgium and the black, green and yellow of Malmedy. In response to the swell of good will palpable in the local dance halls and salons of the town that evening, members of the new government made impromptu appearances at various locations. Invariably they initially met with an apprehensive silence, broken only by the sound of the *Brabançonne* struck up by the dance bands, until eventually being drowned out by a chorus of fervent cries from the crowd.¹¹⁵

When the new governor entered Eupen some days later, the highs of the previous few days suddenly found their contrast in the valley of the Vesdre. As Baltia and his entourage walked through the narrow streets of the town, he overheard some elderly residents whispering, 'Kaiser weather' (*Kaiser Wetter*), an utterance based on the superstitious notion that the Kaiser brought good weather whenever he visited. Whilst Baltia may well have taken encouragement from such a comment, he anticipated a cool reception from the local population. Baltia did not wish to replicate the embarrassing spectacle that had taken the edge off his arrival in Malmedy. This time he was more realistic in his expectations as Léon Xhaflaire, his newly appointed district commissioner, introduced him to the mayor of Eupen, Graf von Metternich. For Baltia, the more subdued atmosphere in Eupen was not out of character with the German temperament, which he described as being inherently more reserved than that of its Walloon counterpart. He was perhaps a little disingenuous in attributing to the reserved nature of Germans what by any standard was a collective show of indifference to his official arrival. When news of the Saar plebiscite would reach Eupen some fifteen years later, it would be greeted with a very different response, proving that the German capacity for celebration was at least on a par with that of its Latin alternative. In fact, Baltia was only too well aware of the true depth of pro-German sentiment in Eupen and St Vith. Yet he believed that, following the implementation and successful conclusion of the popular consultation, he would be better equipped to exorcize the ghost of their Prussian past.

Baltia professed a great difficulty in understanding many of the local agents in situ, whom he described as having been 'raised in a milieu in which each one has his own mentality and terminology, and distinctive methods of work and classification'.¹¹⁶ His view on the mentality of the German population over which he now governed is incisive:

¹¹⁵Rapport sur l'activité, i, 12.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 14.

It is the manifestation of military and civic discipline that destroys all initiative among these people. Before making a decision the citizen goes to ask his local *Bürgermeister* who is a Prussian functionary, the latter addresses the *Landrat* for advice who in turn receives directives from the *Regierungspräsident*, then the *Oberpräsident* of the *Rheinzprovinz* and finally the ministry responsible.¹¹⁷

Baltia believed that the local inhabitants looked on his regime as similar to that of a *Regierungspräsident* in Aachen. Hence, a great deal of local interaction allowed his officials to learn a good deal about the mindsets of many of those who came to their offices. Most of the time, people came with trivial enough problems, such as disputes with a neighbour over a land barrier. If a disagreement arose between an official of the Eupen-Malmedy Government and a local, Baltia noted that 'the German likes to be flattered and to show his worth'. It was nevertheless necessary to show them 'that one has the power, and that one is capable of using it when necessary; that one is the master and wishes to stay master. Once convinced of this they tend to give way.' In time, this theory would be put to the test.¹¹⁸

‘FROM SWEETBREAD TO THE WHIP’: COMBATTING ANTI-BELGIAN ACTIVISM

Although relations between Baltia and Brussels were somewhat strained, in the nascent phase of his regime such concerns paled in comparison with what Baltia saw as the very real threat posed by anti-Belgian activists. Such agitation was evident from within the two districts themselves, but was believed also to be exacerbated by dissidents who crossed the border from the occupied Rhineland with great regularity, disseminating tracts of anti-Belgian literature, often with the imprimatur of the authorities in Berlin. This cross-border agitation was complemented by more localized forms of protest. A number of arrests had already been made in Eupen prior to Baltia's arrival. In the autumn of 1919, a school teacher, Laugenberg, and his co-accused, Mockel, had been arrested for producing anti-Belgian literature.¹¹⁹ The degree to which Berlin had a hand in orchestrating anti-Belgian agitation would remain an open question

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Rapport sur l'activité, i, 4–6.

¹¹⁹'Une nouvelle arrestation', *La Meuse*, 8 October 1919.

throughout the lifetime of the transitory regime. In order to combat such pro-German activity, which had the potential to undo the entire assimilation project, the transitory period was characterized by a latent but effective press censorship.

A total of five local German-language newspapers circulated in the districts during the transitory period. Both the *Eupener Zeitung*, the former correspondence sheet in Eupen, which up to 1921 had been the *Korrespondenzblatt*, and the *Eupener Nachrichten* had both maintained a patriotic stance for the duration of the war, the latter being closely associated with Catholic interests and the German Centre Party (*Zentrum Partei*). In the immediate post-war phase, both of these organs were therefore scornful of the prospect of becoming Belgian. Both were censored by the allies in 1918 and this continued under Baltia. *Die Arbeit* (meaning 'The Work'), which represented the interests of the *Gewerkschaftsbundes Eupen-Malmedy* (Free Trade Union Confederation of Eupen-Malmedy) and the POB campaigned for a new and secret referendum on the question of retrocession. *Der Landbote* (The Land Messenger), which was published twice weekly between 1921 and 1937, was equally revisionist.¹²⁰ Originating in St Vith, the Malmedy *St. Vither Volkszeitung* tended to sit on the fence initially in terms of its support for the transitory regime. Before long, however, it began to embrace openly the general direction that the new regime was taking.¹²¹ In Eupen, the *Fliegende Taube* was a pro-Belgian daily originating from inside 'old Belgium', which seemed to be witnessing a positive enough reception in the region. Only two francophone newspapers originated from within the districts. *La Semaine*, like the *Eupener Nachrichten*, had a close association with the *Zentrum Partei*. It printed some articles in the Walloon dialect also. The other francophone newspaper, *La Warche*, was avidly pro-Belgian and had only commenced publication in 1919. Its founder, Henri Bragard, was a prominent defender of Walloon culture and had advocated strongly for the incorporation of Malmedy into Belgium. For Bragard, his marginalized position during the British occupation

¹²⁰Heinz Warny, 'Erste Schritte im Nebel: Grenz Echo (1926–1940)', in Heinz Warny (ed.), *Zwei Jahrhunderte deutschsprachige Zeitung in Ostbelgien* (Eupen: Grenz Echo Verlag, 2007), 11–78 (15).

¹²¹*Rapport sur l'activité*, i, 193.

had now become transformed into one of considerable influence as his newspaper was recognized by none other than Baltia himself as playing a considerable role in changing mentalities in the region. In return for its pro-Belgian stance, the newspaper received funding from the Eupen-Malmedy government, as it was clear to Bertrand and to Baltia that it would not have survived on its own. However, the pro-Belgian publication was only effective in terms of the French-speaking population.¹²²

Be that as it may, it is evident that Baltia's regime operated an effective censorship of the press, which limited the articulation of anti-Belgian feeling.¹²³ It was rather futile for any newspaper in the region to criticize the transitory regime, as this was forbidden. Any newspaper that dared to challenge Baltia's assimilatory programme risked being closed down. Publications were also liable to fall foul of the regime if they reported on either the consequences of the war or of the Versailles Treaty.¹²⁴ Andreas Fickers has termed such attempts to suppress any reference to the recent past as akin to 'organized amnesia'.¹²⁵ However, there is some

¹²²Of the 60,213 population recorded in the 1920 census, 44,933 people (just under 77% of the population) spoke only German. Just 4066 spoke only French (just under 7% of the population), while 8,254 (13.7%) spoke both French and German. A small number, 145, spoke French and Flemish, while only sixty spoke German and Flemish. Interestingly, 2,436 spoke neither German, French nor Flemish. As many as 3,582 of those resident in the territory came from places as diverse as Poland, Russia, Switzerland, Austria, Bosnia, Sweden, Italy and England. Ministère de l'Intérieur belge, *Statistique de la Belgique: population, recensement général* (31 Décembre 1920) (Bruxelles: M. Weissenbruch, 1926), 562–565.

¹²³Christoph Brüll, Un passé mouvementé. L'histoire de la communauté germanophone de Belgique, in K. Stangherlin (ed.), *La communauté germanophone de Belgique—Die Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft belgiens* (Bruxelles: La Chartre, 2005), 26–27.

¹²⁴Heidi Christmann, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation in Eupen-Malmedy zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen* (München, 1974) [Unpublished] 68–80; Brüll, *Eupen-Malmedy 1918–1945: le temps des déchirures*, 8–9.

¹²⁵Fickers, De la "Sibérie de la Prusse" aux "cantons rédimés": L'ombre diffuse de la première guerre mondiale dans la mémoire collective des Belges germanophones, in S. Jaumain, M. Amara, B. Majerus, A. Vrints (eds), *Une guerre totale? La Belgique dans la Première Guerre Mondiale: nouvelles tendances de la recherche historique* (Bruxelles: Archives générales du Royaume) 615–633; Freddy Cremer 'Verschlussache Geschichte: Überden Umgang mit der eigenen Vergangenheit', in Carlo Lejeune, Andreas Fickers & Freddy Cremer, *Spuren in die Zukunft: Anmerkungen zu einem bewegten Jahrhundert* (Büllingen: Lexis, 2001), 18.

evidence of journalists and editors attempting to circumvent such restrictions by openly informing readers of the prohibitions being placed on them in reporting or commenting on a particular event. The *Eupener Nachrichten* newspaper, for example, informed its readers that 'all of their questions could not be answered under today's conditions' and that 'many letters and questions written to the newspaper could not be answered'.¹²⁶

Baltia received regular updates from the Belgian Foreign Ministry in Brussels on criticisms of his censorship as viewed across the border in Germany. In the main, the German press depicted the Belgian authorities as 'feverishly working towards assuring in advance a successful outcome to the plebiscite'. It was reported in one newspaper as early as November 1919 that the Belgians had begun to sell books to the local population in which the atrocities committed by Germany during the occupation of the country were detailed. The books were often handed out for free, but according to some reports the accounts contained in these publications were often either 'factually incorrect' or 'anachronistic'.¹²⁷

Baltia refused to be complacent about the designs of German irredentist agitators. By the middle of March, with the assistance of some of the heads of industry in the region, he decided to charge some of his officials with the responsibility of 'purifying' the area of individuals who had settled there prior to the introduction of more recent restrictions on movement to and from the borderland territory. These measures included cracking down on opportunists who sought to benefit from the generous rate offered against redeemed German marks, and who continued to weave in and out of the territory to this end. Already towards the end of 1919, various communes had noted an unusual rise in the number of new inhabitants. Apart from those attracted by the advantages accruing from the exchange of marks, an increasing number of refugees had begun to arrive from outside the fourth zone to benefit from more generous rationing and better living conditions. The local inhabitants were therefore worried for their own food supplies, and made their feelings known to local officials. An additional attraction was the relative freedom

¹²⁶'Briefkasten der Redaktion', *Eupener Nachrichten*, 20 March 1920; Christmann, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation in Eupen-Malmedy*, 70.

¹²⁷SAE, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères to Herman Baltia, 5 November 1919; 'Die Situation in Eupen-Malmedy', *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 25 October 1919.

to change one's dwelling without the permission of the military authorities. In an attempt to stem this tide, the commandant of the army of occupation made it compulsory that any change of domicile had to have the permission of the local commandant of the *cercle*. Another measure made it compulsory that visitors to the territory obtain advance permission from the government of Eupen-Malmedy before arriving. Such moves met with limited success, as authorities noted a continued stream of pro-German propagandists finding their way into the cantons. Special control points were set up along the border with Germany, and both customs officials and the gendarmerie were asked to co-operate in being more vigilant in their day-to-day surveillance. Baltia also appealed to the burgomasters of the communes.

It has come to my attention that a number of persons normally resident in Germany have introduced themselves into the territories of my High Commissariat and stay without any authorization. Besides the obvious damage that these foreigners could do to my government, they will try by every means to benefit from the program of food aid to the detriment of the inhabitants of Eupen and Malmedy. It is therefore necessary to put an end to this state of affairs which is prejudicial to everybody.¹²⁸

Henceforth, it was now the responsibility of the local authorities to account for the presence of these 'foreigners' in a commune. Prior permission from the transitory government needed to be sought before coming to the territory. Following the discovery of any such unauthorized individuals, they would be given just twenty-four hours to leave. As a testament to the paranoid atmosphere that prevailed in the districts, the burgomasters now had to show evidence that they had issued expulsion orders to such 'foreigners'. As a consequence, within a very short space of time the demand for passports to pass from Germany into the territories rose sharply. This in effect made it somewhat easier to identify and to track the movement of suspected troublemakers. That said, much of the traffic passing to and fro had more to do with subsistence than subversion. Workers from Eupen who had to travel to work in Aachen were issued with special work permits, which allowed them to travel freely across the border. The absence of farm labourers in the districts necessitated that the government allow farmers to recruit across the border

¹²⁸Rapport sur l'activité, i, 141–142.

in the Rhineland. Such workers were permitted to reside in a commune under cover of a permit of temporary residency (*séjour temporaire*).

In a further hardening of the government's approach to the problem of illegal aliens, all those resident in the territory after 1 August 1914 had to appear before a local commission composed of the local burgomaster and an inspector from the army. It was the commission's function to confirm who these individuals were, what their purpose was in the cantons and in what kind of employment, if any, they were involved. If in public employment, their case was to be looked upon in a more benevolent light. The general conduct of the individual and his or her attitude towards the governing regime were also queried, and verification sought as to whether the interviewee had a court case pending.¹²⁹

Baltia believed that the work of the commission could prove rather complex in its application. Therefore, he felt it best that it 'not be subject to a rigid set of rules'. In this way, the commission was given free rein in its day-to-day dealings with people. Those who fell afoul of the commission were issued with an *arrêté d'expulsion*, and would have to leave the territory immediately. Exceptions could be made in the case of those able to prove that they were originally from the Eupen-Malmedy region. According to the terms of Article 34 of the Versailles Treaty, if threatened with expulsion an individual had the right to appeal. Baltia was therefore aware of the need to approach such cases with caution.

Neither the Eupen-Malmedy government nor the Belgian state could afford any negative publicity at this sensitive stage. The last thing Baltia wanted was to play into the hands of the propagandists in Berlin ahead of the public expression of opinion. Nevertheless, he was intent on ridding the territory of all 'parasites who had come to vegetate [there]'.¹³⁰ Of the 4,500 individuals who presented themselves before the special commission, 435 were served with an *arrêté d'expulsion*. The majority of these had already been convicted of various breaches of the law, or had come to the attention of the authorities as a result of their conduct during the war. The setting up of a public register in each commune in line with the procedure in operation throughout Belgium further facilitated the process of public cleansing (*assainissement publique*), which, Baltia assured the prime minister, was 'demanded by the public'.

¹²⁹Rapport sur l'activité, i, 141–142.

¹³⁰Ibid, 143.

This localized *épuration* proved invaluable in further obstructing attempts by dissident elements from campaigning against the annexation.¹³¹ Repelling the threat posed by dissidents, however, needed some input from Brussels also. Yet here again co-operation was slow in coming. Six weeks after the governor of Eupen-Malmedy had taken office, Delacroix was now similarly concerned with the lack of purpose being shown by government departments in providing assistance to their corresponding numbers in Eupen-Malmedy. He pleaded with the heads of the various departments to give particular attention to the demands being made by Baltia and his associates, and to treat them with a 'special benevolence', particularly during the six months of the popular consultation.¹³² At this point, it was still far from certain just how the popular consultation would play out. Baltia himself was pessimistic about the likelihood of securing a victory for Belgium. Middle and lower-ranking functionaries from Brussels were deemed essential in facilitating a successful result. However, many of them had not yet arrived in the region. Baltia recognized that the functionaries sent thus far resembled a motley crew, which included 'some of the most ardent patriots' who truly understood their role and rendered eminent service. On the other hand, there were those who were 'incapable of departing from their routine habits, lacking initiative, and always looking for *the precedent* (original emphasis) and fearful of their responsibility'. Others were described as 'lazy', and were only there for a good time, seeing the transfer to Malmedy as a kind of adventure. These latter agents turned out to be sorely disappointed with their new roles, and were quickly relieved of their duties. Baltia's selective dismissals fuelled the perception back in Brussels that he was a difficult taskmaster. He was fully aware that his high standards may well have made him more than a few enemies.¹³³ The bureaucrats from Brussels were often irritated by the militaristic management style of this soldier-governor. Baltia however, had little concern for the sensitivities of Brussels functionaries.

There was, in Baltia's view, an urgent need to clamp down on subversive elements in the districts in light of the coming popular consultation,

¹³¹Ibid, 142.

¹³²AAEB, 10.792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, Léon Delacroix to Paul Hymans, 'Très urgent', 25 February 1920.

¹³³LANRW, RW/10/5, Erinnerungen Baltia, 12–13.

and time was of the essence. Belgian officials in the Rhineland informed Hymans of the activities of a group of anti-annexationist Germans in non-occupied Germany, in contravention of the Versailles Treaty. The *Vereinigte Landsmannschaften Eupen-Malmedy*, based at the Chateau de Bellevue in Berlin, published a proclamation in the *Lokal Anzeiger* newspaper, where in rather harsh and belligerent terms it questioned the legitimacy of the annexation and the nascent transitory administration. The article also raised a number of questions as to the secret activities of the Belgian authorities in the region. It highlighted the alleged intimidation of suspected German sympathizers, and the dissemination of propaganda tracts promising at once carrot and stick to undecided inhabitants. This, the article noted, included anything 'from sweetbread to the whip'.¹³⁴ One of the primary goals of an organization such as the *Landsmannschaften Eupen-Malmedy Monschau* was 'to entertain relations between the districts of Eupen and Malmedy and the German nation'.¹³⁵ Such groups were effective in lobbying the government in Berlin for assistance, and highlighting perceived injustices being perpetrated against *Auslandsdeutsche*. *Landsmannschaften* branches sprang up in towns inside Germany out of reach of the Belgian authorities. The organization's newspaper, the *Echo aus Eupen-Malmedy-Monschau*, gave notice of upcoming events and rallies. Although the hand of the *Wilhelmstrasse* was never in doubt, it was difficult for the Belgian authorities to get definitively to the end of the financial and administrative paper trail.¹³⁶ Be that as it may, Baltia was keen to portray his regime to the people of Eupen-Malmedy in the right light. If indeed these were the redeemed cantons, he was something akin to a redeemer, who would save them from the bad old ways of the *Kaiserreich*, and carry them safely 'into the bosom of the *patrie*'. However, beyond the anthropomorphic and romantic rhetoric of the *mère patrie* existed the reality of everyday life,

¹³⁴AAEB, 10.792/II/82/34, Eupen-Malmedy, Count de Kerchove de Denterghem to Paul Hymans, 20 January 1920.

¹³⁵AAEB, 10.792/II/973/373, Eupen-Malmedy, Count de Kerchove de Denterghem to Paul Hymans, with details of Berlin report: Aufzeichnung, 5 March 1920.

¹³⁶AAEB, 10.792/II, 1641/611, Eupen-Malmedy, Count de Kerchove de Denterghem to Hymans, Compte rendu de la séance des Vereinigte Landmanschaften Eupen-Malmédy, 3 April 1920; Katja Schenk, 'Les mouvements de jeunesse germanophiles dans le canton d'Eupen pendant l'entre-deux-guerres' (2 vols) [unpublished thesis] (Université de Liège, 1997), 34–36.

which the war-ravaged population continued to navigate as best they could.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

The dominant issue weighing on people's minds in the immediate aftermath of the war was the level of economic uncertainty that existed. This was equally the case in 'old Belgium'. Baltia was openly critical of what appeared to him to have been a rather arbitrary frontier displacement agreed upon by the architects of Versailles. To Baltia, the agreed contours of the territory displayed a lack of knowledge of the specific economic structures that existed along Belgium's new eastern border. The issue of customs posts, for example, was in his opinion completely overlooked at Versailles. Baltia forged a *modus vivendi* with the IARHC in Koblenz, which resulted in a tariff agreement on the importation of selected raw materials from Germany. This arrangement lasted until 31 May 1925. During this time, the manufacturers of Eupen had to seek other potential markets inside Belgium. This proved a difficult task because the domestic market had collapsed, and there seemed little room for any new competitors.¹³⁷

Since coming under Prussian administration in 1815, the economic compass of the Eupen-Malmedy region had pointed steadily eastwards.¹³⁸ Hence, over a century later, around 3,000 residents from the region worked across the border in Aachen, and commuted back home on a daily basis. In Eupen itself, over 3,000 people were employed in manufacturing, and some fifty factories operated throughout the district. The most common form of employment was in the textile industry, where over 1,700 people earned a living. This figure had been much higher on the eve of the Great War. Since then, almost 1,000 workers had lost their jobs. Tanning employed about 170 people, again a diminution of the pre-war figure by as much as 25%. Where Malmedy enjoyed considerable natural springs, which had potential for exploitation, the area around Eupen was thought to be rich in mineral deposits of zinc

¹³⁷SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/192, *Haut-Commissariat Royal d'Eupen-Malmedy*, Rapport sur l'activité générale du Gouvernement d'Eupen et de Malmedy, ii (July 1920–January 1921) (*hereafter*, *Rapport sur l'activité*, ii), 70.

¹³⁸Georges Theunis, 'Belgium Today', *Foreign Affairs*, 4 (2) (January 1926), 264–277 (266–268); APB, *Chambre*, 14 July 1920, 217–228.

and copper. Gold had even been extracted from the mines at Born and at Deidenberg, but the quantities were so small now that a serious excavation was deemed infeasible.¹³⁹

The primary industry in Malmédy was paper production. The town's two paper mills employed 550 people between them. The larger Steinbach paper mill had about 400 employees. However, the uncertainty surrounding the exchange of marks threatened the viability of many businesses.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, innovations in working conditions being debated in the Belgian parliament, such as the reduction in the working week, augured badly for firms in Eupen-Malmédy in what was an already extraordinarily difficult trading environment.¹⁴¹ Wages were still quite high when compared with the rest of Belgium where there had been a reduction in incomes following the war.¹⁴² The greatest concentration of labour was still very much in the area of agriculture and forestry. The entire territory encapsulated an area of some 106,903 hectares (this would change slightly following the border rectification), of which the district of Malmédy comprised 81,315, Eupen 17,588 and Monschau (Montjoie) 8,000 hectares. In total, this amounted to about a third of the agricultural area being covered in forestry. Almost all the agricultural land was devoted to pasture, whilst only about 5% served tillage. Some 18,000 farmworkers were spread across over 3,200 farms in Malmédy. A further 1400 were employed in tanneries and in small manufacturing, giving employment in sectors as diverse as brickmaking and confectionery. However, these latter businesses faced an uncertain future as a result of the influx of mass-produced and cheaper goods coming from Britain and the United States. Firms such as *Klinkenberg* in Eupen, reacted to such difficult circumstances by diversifying into other products when the market for their staple product dried up.¹⁴³

Added to these uncertainties was a severe lack of coal in the region, which had been ongoing since January. Public lighting had to be tightly restricted, while in the homes across the cantons heating and light were

¹³⁹ *Rapport sur l'activité, Malmédy, i*, 18–19.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Höjer, *Le régime parlementaire belge de 1918 à 1940*, 105–107.

¹⁴² SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III/193, *Haut Commissariat Royal d'Eupen Malmédy, Rapport sur l'activité générale du Gouvernement d'Eupen et de Malmédy (July 1921–January 1922) (Hereafter, Rapport sur l'activité, iii)*, 28–29.

¹⁴³ *Rapport sur l'activité, iii*, 31.

almost non-existent. Hence it was difficult for people to believe was the idea that their lives were about to improve in the post-war period, and that 'the bosom of the Belgian *patrie*' (*le sein de la patrie belge*) would provide more comfort, more reassurance and more room to manoeuvre than had the *Kaiserreich*.¹⁴⁴

Prior to Baltia's arrival, Brussels had already provided nine million francs for the provision of foodstuffs and basic necessities for the relief of all inhabitants of the region. Unlike the situation in the rest of Belgium, the withdrawal of German currency was much slower, and this created innumerable opportunities for fraud.¹⁴⁵ The exchange rate in Eupen-Malmedy was fixed at one franc to the mark.¹⁴⁶ In February, Baltia promulgated a decree stipulating that German monies would be withdrawn from circulation in the districts over the course of an eight-day period: 23 February to 2 March for Malmedy, and 5 March to 13 March for Eupen.¹⁴⁷ The Belgian government made available 110,000,000 francs to accommodate the exchange. Of this, some 45 million were made available through the issuing of money vouchers (*bons de caisse*), which were redeemable after ten years at an initial rate of 3%, although this was later raised to 5%. The remaining 65 million francs were distributed in notes among the local communal administrations. These monies had to be repaid to the Belgian exchequer but only after they had been redeemed against Germany's assets.¹⁴⁸ The limit imposed on amounts which could be exchanged during this period was initially set at 1,000 marks per person. This was eventually increased to 1,700 per

¹⁴⁴AAEB, 10.792/II/1654, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Delacroix, 9 February 1920.

¹⁴⁵Robert P. Grathwol, 'Germany and the Eupen-Malmedy affair 1924–1926: "Here lies the spirit of Locarno"' in *Central European History*, 8 (3) (September 1975), 221–250; Manfred, J. Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism: Germany, Belgium and the Eupen-Malmedy Question 1919–1929* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980), 34–50; Fernand Baudhin, La balance économique de la Belgique avant et après la guerre, *Bulletin d'Études et d'Information de l'École Supérieure de Commerce St. Ignace* (November 1924), 3–55; Henry L. Shepherd, *The Monetary Experience of Belgium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), 10–11.

¹⁴⁶'Décret 5, fixant provisoirement la valeur du Mark pour le paiement des taxes revenant à l'État', 20 January 1920, *Recueil*, i, 14.

¹⁴⁷These dates were later altered, with two extra days of grace being given in Malmedy and the period of exchange in Eupen lasting from 8 to 17 March. Décret 20, 27 February 1920, *Recueil*, i, 38.

¹⁴⁸*Rapport sur l'activité*, ii, 37.

person, which was greater than that previously set for individuals in the rest of Belgium. The measure was, however, limited to civilians situated in the cantons prior to 1 August 1914. A limit on the amount eligible for exchange after that period was set at 200 francs per head of family per month, and 100 francs for each member of a household. Some employers had larger amounts advanced to them at the same rate.¹⁴⁹ On average, just over 1800 francs per head of population was exchanged across both districts.¹⁵⁰

The Belgian government made 64 million francs available to Baltia to be exchanged on the basis of one franc to the mark.¹⁵¹ Several inhabitants with large families took advantage of the generous rate for each family member. On numerous occasions, however, the money was changed back to German currency in Aachen at a time when the German currency was continuing to depreciate. This type of speculation benefited those involved by as much as 200 to 300%. Those hardest hit however, were those paid in German currency, like the 3,000 Eupeners working in Aachen but living in Eupen. By now the mark was worth less than a third of a franc, and was rapidly decreasing in value. There was, however, some relief, albeit at a price. Some people were able to negotiate a special further exchange of anywhere between one and three-quarters and three marks to the franc, but this depended on whether or not the individual in question had signed the register of protest that had been opened to the public since 23 January.¹⁵² The introduction of the Belgian currency at this stage, long before the definitive result of the public expression of opinion could be known, was intended to sway the minds of the population and exploit their pecuniary situation.

Baltia was, however, forced to introduce several stringent measures that he himself described as 'draconian', such as the prohibition on the

¹⁴⁹Décret 20, 'Prorogation du délai accordé pour le retrait des marks dans le district de Malmedy, et fixation du délai pour Eupen', 27 February 1920, *Recueil*, i, 38.

¹⁵⁰A. Quadflieg & Peter Quadflieg, 'Die "Cantons Rédimés" und der belgische Franken. Währungsreformen in Ostbelgien 1920 und 1944', in Peter Quadflieg and C. Rass, *Kriegserfahrung im Grenzland. Perspektiven auf das 20. Jahrhundert zwischen Maas und Rhein* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2014) 106–111.

¹⁵¹Décret 13, Retrait des monnaies allemandes. Mesures d'exécution', 13 February 1920, *Recueil*, i, 21–24.

¹⁵²Rapport sur l'activité, i, 20–22.

banks to change marks for francs.¹⁵³ Belgium's Finance Minister Georges Theunis cautioned against the risk of fraud, which although hard to eliminate, at the very least needed to be reduced, especially when one considers the way in which the Belgian state itself was exposed to opportunists following its commitment to cover the billions of marks circulated in Belgium during the occupation at a rate of one and a quarter francs to the mark.¹⁵⁴ This decision had been made long before the drastic devaluation of the German currency, and at a time when Belgium believed Germany would be forced by the Versailles Treaty to compensate it for the marks in circulation. However, the Versailles Treaty was devoid of any such stipulation regarding the marks question.¹⁵⁵

Speculators from across the border in Belgium also began to pour into the cantons in tandem with the ever-dwindling value of the German currency. In response to such opportunism, passports had now to be presented by those looking to enter the *la nouvelle Belgique* from Belgium. Merchants in Eupen-Malmedy were forbidden to sell goods to people living outside the two districts during this time, and if they did, the goods were seized on their departure from the territory. But such measures, albeit extreme, were short-term and could not continue indefinitely without impacting either psychologically or materially on the population.¹⁵⁶ By the summer of 1920, the process of currency exchange in Eupen-Malmedy had been more or less completed save for a few late submissions. Inside 'old Belgium', the bigger question of what to do with over six billion German marks, which had been imposed on the economy during the occupation, remained to be resolved. In time, the marks question would prove to have significant consequences for Eupen-Malmedy. For now at least, it seemed that significant progress had been made on a local level.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³AAEB, 10.792/II, 1654, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Delacroix, 9 February 1920.

¹⁵⁴Archives du Palais Royal [APR], 536, Procès-verbal, 14 March 1921.

¹⁵⁵Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 35.

¹⁵⁶AAEB, 10.792/II, 1654, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Delacroix, 9 February 1920.

¹⁵⁷Despite several attempts by the Belgian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference to force Germany to resolve the mark question to the benefit of the Belgian state, the request was repeatedly rejected by the Council of Four. P.M. Burnett, *Reparation at the Peace Conference from the Standpoint of the American Delegation*, i (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 947.

As early as October 1919, Baltia had already signalled his intentions for the year ahead. He insisted that in order to 'avoid conflict' it would be necessary to continue to administer the two districts under German law, whilst incrementally applying modifications. Change was not to be manifested in an abrupt manner, but instead characterized by a series of piecemeal alterations.¹⁵⁸ The delivery of his proclamation heralded the beginning of a new chapter in the region's history. While Baltia's proclamation offered a number of safeguards to the ethnic German community, it also unnerved German nationalists unhappy with the new dispensation.

Replacing many of the local functionaries with pro-Belgian personnel was only the beginning of a much more intensive and intricate process of administrative extirpation, which would affect all areas of public life. A more thorough transformation could not be properly undertaken until after the outcome of the public expression of opinion was known, and the districts definitively ceded to Belgium. But as yet nothing was cast in stone, as public sentiment remained in a state of flux. For those who had longed for unification with Belgium, the future certainly seemed more assured. However, the majority of the population continued to navigate in a fog of confusion and uncertainty. Fear of denunciation defined the day-to-day environment in which the ordinary people of Eupen-Malmedy operated. This anxious state of affairs intensified following the opening of the registers of protest. Not until the much-touted *consultation populaire* had been dealt with could some form of stability be achieved, and Baltia could set about his mission of national assimilation in earnest.

¹⁵⁸AAEB, 10.792/II/66, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Léon Delacroix, 26 October 1919.

Farce and Tragedy in Eupen-Malmedy: The Public Expression of Opinion and its Discontents

The promethean torch of self-determination, which was set alight following President Woodrow Wilson's speech to the League to Enforce Peace on 27 May 1916—in which he stated: 'We believe these fundamental things: First that every people has a right to choose the sovereignty under which they shall live.'¹—increased the potential for new ethnic conflicts and the aggravation of old ones that had lain dormant during the age of empire.² A year later, in response to statements made by both the German Chancellor Georg von Hertling and the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Georg Czernin, on how they intended to deal over the heads of the inhabitants of territories affected by the war, President Wilson responded that '[n]ational aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be dominated and governed *only* by their own consent' [author's emphasis]. He added that '[s]elf-determination

¹Woodrow Wilson, Address delivered at the First Annual Assemblage of the League to Enforce Peace: 'American Principles', 27 May 1916, <https://archive.org/stream/congressionalrec53iunit#page/n829/mode/2up>.

²'No peace can last or ought to last, which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property.' President Woodrow Wilson speech to the US Congress, 22 January 1917, cited in Sarah Wambaugh, *Plebiscites Since the World War with a Collection of Official Documents*, (2 vols.), i (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1933), 5; see also Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19–25.

[was] not a mere phrase', and that people and provinces were not to be 'bartered about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were mere chattels and pawns in a game'. Ironically, following Germany's defeat, these very sentiments would be invoked by the German delegation to the Paris Peace Conference when criticizing the draft treaty submitted to them in May 1919.

The Versailles Treaty contained mechanisms that ostensibly aimed to avoid conflict, through the holding of plebiscites in resolving disputes over territory and resources. The revival of the concept of a plebiscite as an instrument of territorial readjustment owed much to the Wilsonian principle of self-determination. This is in spite of Wilson's misgivings and those of his closest advisors on the reliability of a plebiscite to achieve such ends, except as a last resort.³ Instead, Wilson preferred some kind of impartial investigation, most likely under the auspices of the League of Nations, which would assess the political and social situation on the ground in a particular territory.⁴

The utility of plebiscites to determine the future status of a people and their territory has had a rather chequered past. The French relied on plebiscites to facilitate the annexation of territory following the French Revolution. However, these consultations were held while the territories in question were under French military occupation. Following the fall of Napoleon, the Congress of Vienna dispensed with the concept of a plebiscite as an instrument of political resolution. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the mechanism was once again revived. In Italy, plebiscites were held between 1860 and 1870 when the *Risorgimento* forged into one complete unit a Mediterranean mosaic of historic regions.⁵ Later in the century, the Treaty of Turin was approved by two plebiscites held in Savoy and Nice, as was the cession of St Bartholomew from Sweden to France in 1877. Indeed, the separation of Norway and Sweden took place following the outcome of a plebiscite in 1905.⁶

³Wilson was more an advocate of nationalities having autonomy within the state in which they lived rather than encouraging them to cede from it entirely. Wambaugh, *Plebiscites Since The World War*, i, 11–14.

⁴Wambaugh, *Plebiscites*, i, 13.

⁵Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento: State Society and National Unification* (London: Routledge, 1994), 11–28.

⁶Yves Beigbeder, *International Monitoring of Plebiscites, Referenda and National Elections: Self-determination and Transition to Democracy* (Dordrechts, Boston & London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1994), 77–78.

With the Versailles Treaty, the use of plebiscites seemed once again in vogue as a means of settling contentious border and territorial issues. In this regard, the treaty stipulated that Germany's frontier with Denmark to the north, Poland to the east and the Saarland between Lorraine and Luxembourg to the west should be decided either in the short or longer term by a plebiscite.⁷ In the case of Eupen-Malmedy, the Treaty recommended 'a public expression of opinion' as the most appropriate way to decide the future status of the borderland territory. In Baltia's proclamation, as in the French text of the treaty, it was referred to as a '*consultation populaire*', which was to be executed under the sole control of the Belgian authorities within the first six months of the treaty coming into effect.⁸ Neither the term 'public expression of opinion' nor 'popular consultation', however, accurately describes what took place in Eupen-Malmedy during the first six months of the transitory regime. From the outset, the exercise was wrought with controversy, amid accusations of intimidation of protestors or would-be protestors by the Belgian authorities. This was quite apart from the prior objections raised by the German delegation to the Peace Conference in Paris.⁹

The public expression of opinion has been mistakenly referred to as a plebiscite by historians, and was regularly referred to as such in contemporary newspaper reports, more for convenience than anything else. The man charged with overseeing the exercise was keen to make the distinction, however, between a plebiscite and a public expression of opinion. Herman Baltia was adamant that, in spite of the criticisms, he had fulfilled his duties to the spirit and letter of Article 34 of the treaty.¹⁰

Out of an eligible electorate of 33,726, just 271 signed the register in protest. What follows, examines the reasons for the low level of participation in the public expression of opinion.¹¹ One argues that the

⁷Wambaugh, *Plebiscites*, vol. i, 15–16.

⁸The closing of the registers was extended for two weeks until 23 July 1920.

⁹*The Treaty of Versailles*, iii. i. 34, 28 June 1919.

¹⁰Staatsarchiv Eupen (SAE), Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III.191, Haut-*Commissariat Royal d'Eupen Malmedy*, Rapport sur l'activité générale du Gouvernement d'Eupen et de Malmedy, September 1919–July 1920 (hereafter, 'Rapport sur l'activité') i, 142.

¹¹Heinz Doepgen, *Die Abtretung des Gebietes von Eupen-Malmedy an Belgien im Jahre 1920* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1966), 115–212; Freddy Cremer & Werner Mießén, *Spuren: Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens*, Veröffentlichung aus Anlass der Gedenkfeierlichkeiten zum Kriegsende (Eupen: König-Baudouin-Stiftung, 1996), 9.

negligible turnout was not solely a result of coercion from Baltia's agents, although this certainly played a significant part. The choice facing many inhabitants caught in the vortex of the post-war turmoil was a stark one. Either one clung to the floating wreckage of a defunct empire, weighted down by a cargo of post-war demands, or took one's chances in the uncharted waters of Belgian annexation. In this way, the public expression of opinion may be seen as salient in Eupen-Malmedy's troubled historical path. Due to the dubious nature of its execution, the public expression of opinion has earned the sobriquet '*la petite farce belge*'.¹² But behind the scenes of this modern-day farce was the tragic reality facing tens of thousands of inhabitants, whose lives were greatly affected by its outcome. The contested consultation would later become the motif for much inflamed rhetoric from Chancellor Scheidemann to Adolf Hitler for a revision of the Versailles Treaty, and the holding of a new consultation. It would equally appear as an embarrassment to many Belgians, specifically those associated with the POB, at least up to the coming to power of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) in 1933.¹³

In what follows, one first assesses the public expression of opinion in relation to plebiscites that took place elsewhere as a result of the peace negotiations. This will enable us to distinguish the consultation's unique characteristics. Apart from the consultation in Eupen-Malmedy, four separate plebiscites were stipulated by the Versailles Treaty. The other treaties agreed at the Paris Peace Conference were either less dependent on the use of a plebiscite or not at all. The Treaty of Saint Germain with Austria stipulated the necessity for just one plebiscite, which would determine the status of the Klagenfurt Basin in southern Carinthia, which was divided into two zones for the exercise. The Treaty of Trianon did not provide for a consultation *per se*. However, following the signing of the Treaty of Venice in 1921 by Austria, Hungary and Italy, Hungary agreed to cede the area of western Hungary known as The Burgenland to Austria. In addition to this, a plebiscite was held in the city of Sopron,

¹²Doeppen, *Die Abtretung*, 115–120; P. Veithen, Die Volksbefragung in Eupen-Malmedy-St. Vith und ihre unmittelbaren Folgen, *Annales*, ii (Fédération Archéologique, Historique et Folklorique de Belgique, XLIIème congrès) (Malmedy, 1974), 155–163.

¹³Manfred J. Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism: Germany, Belgium and the Eupen-Malmedy Question, 1919–1929* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980), 30–31.

which resulted in Hungary retaining the area around Ödenburg.¹⁴ The Treaty of Sèvres allowed for just one plebiscite, affording the people of Smyrna the opportunity to decide in favour of Greek or Turkish sovereignty.¹⁵ No plebiscites were provided for in the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine between the Allied and Associated Powers and Bulgaria.¹⁶

Some boundary issues, however, were not catered for in the text of the treaties themselves, but were to be dealt with separately by the League of Nations.¹⁷ One such case of particular import to this study was that of Vilna, modern-day Vilnius. This was the only other instance where the recommendation for a resolution between the rival claimants to a piece of territory proposed that a public expression of opinion be held. In the end, in spite of exhaustive efforts by the League of Nations, no plebiscite took place in Vilnius. What was significant, however, was that the conditions outlined for this second public expression of opinion differed greatly from those proposed for Eupen-Malmedy. Later in this chapter, a brief comparison of both exercises shall be made. Substantively, the consultation in Eupen-Malmedy was the most important hurdle that Baltia would have to surmount. If a majority of the population did not declare for Belgium, this would have meant a rather premature winding up of the transitory regime, and a ‘retrocession’ of *‘la nouvelle Belgique’* to Germany. In the weeks and months preceding the opening of the registers, Baltia was keenly aware of the rather advanced state of German propaganda in the region.¹⁸

¹⁴Lawrence Martin, *The Treaties of Peace 1919–1923: The Treaty of Versailles, The Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye, The Treaty of Trianon*, Vol. i (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange Ltd. [1924] 2007), xxviii.

¹⁵D. Cree, ‘Yugoslav-Hungarian boundary commission’, *The Geographical Journal*, 65 (2) (February 1925), 98–100.

¹⁶Wambaugh, *Plebiscites*, 37; H.W.V. Temperley, *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris* (4 vols.) (London: Oxford University Press/ Hodder & Stoughton, 1920), i., 48–49.

¹⁷Article 87 of the Versailles Treaty specified that ‘The boundaries not laid down in the present day treaty will be subsequently determined by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers.’ *The Treaty of Versailles*, iii. viii.

¹⁸AAEB, Eupen-Malmedy, 10.792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, Herman Baltia to Pierre Van Werveke, 4 January 1920.

The considerable control exercised by Catholic clerics over the consciences of the inhabitants was a formidable obstacle to the fulfilment of this nascent phase of the transition. The Belgian authorities had sufficient knowledge of the menacing role being played by these political proselytizers, spurred on by their superiors in Germany. The recently deceased Archbishop Hartmann of Cologne, to whose diocese both Eupen and Malmedy were still attached, was known to have played a considerable role in the affairs of the region, having issued his own proclamation in July of 1919, in which he called upon all German inhabitants to 'search their consciences as to the right thing to do'.¹⁹ Pamphlets such as that entitled *The Ten Commandments (Die Zehn Gebote)* warned the inhabitants of the dire consequences of becoming Belgian. The first commandment reminded inhabitants how:

The future of your *Heimat*, your homes, and your family is given into your hands. Do not sell it for a gift certificate such as white bread or francs that will later be taken from you through increased taxes.²⁰

If anything, Hartmann's passing merely inspired his followers to continue his work. His immediate successor, Archbishop Karl Josef Schulte, proved no less antagonistic.

Other activities which sought to ensure a successful outcome to the popular consultation from a German perspective had the imprimatur of the Weimar government. In the town of Charlottenburg near Berlin, the *Vereinigte Landsmannschaft Eupen-Malmedy* continued to arrange for German residents of *Eupenois* origin to visit the *Kreis* and impress upon locals the importance of declaring in favour of Germany. The German government published notices in the *Berliner Tageblatt* newspaper inviting inhabitants to do just that.²¹ Once the consultation was under

¹⁹AAEB, 10.792/I/9689, Eupen-Malmedy, Le Chef d'État-Major Général, P.O., Le Sous-Chef d'E.M.G. Armée Belge G.Q.G., L'État Major to Ministère des Affaires Étrangère, 3 July 1919.

²⁰Auswärtiges Amt (AA), Zehn Gebote, AA, R764.17, Akten betreffend die Volksbefragung in Eupen-Malmedy, 1920, 'Die Zehn Gebote' [no date].

²¹*Berliner Tageblatt*, 15 & 16 October 1919; AAEB, 10.792/II/6279, Eupen-Malmedy, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères to Vincent Ernst de Brunswick, Consul Général de Belgique, 18 November 1919.

way, Baltia's regime would nevertheless show a greater determination to quell dissent within the contested territory.

PLEBISCITES AND CONSULTATIONS: A BRIEF COMPARISON

As soon as he was installed in his seat of government in Malmedy, Baltia set about administering the popular consultation with zeal. He clearly understood the perils attached to such a far from assured endeavour. Writing to Delacroix in February, he warned, 'If the results [of the consultation] and the decision of the League of Nations will go against us, I should not alone with my functionaries bear the responsibility.'²² The wording of Article 34 of the Versailles Treaty gave free reign to Belgium to exploit the public expression of opinion, while the international community looked the other way. A fair criticism of the article would be that it was too limited in its explication as to how the entire exercise was to be conducted.²³ Pro-German opinion in the region, and across the border in the Rhineland, as well as in Berlin, registered serious misgivings about the lack of checks and balances associated with the consultation—particularly in light of the fact that the League of Nations had entrusted the surveillance of the popular consultation to the Belgian authorities, and not to a neutral observer. What is more, the process was to be an open one where locals would have to travel from their villages and farms to the *Hôtel de Ville* in either Eupen or Malmedy and sign the register of protest in the presence of Baltia's functionaries.²⁴

This less than transparent state of affairs was raised by the German delegation to the Peace Conference.²⁵ They furthermore claimed how the allied governments, in a note to the German delegation of 16 June 1919, had intimated that the vote in Eupen and Malmedy would be in keeping with plebiscites in Schleswig and elsewhere. Furthermore, the idea that the consultation was going to be carried out in an impartial manner under the shadow of the Belgian authorities was derided by the

²²AAEB, 10/792/II/1654, Eupen-Malmedy, Herman Baltia to Léon Delacroix, 9 February 1920.

²³The Versailles Treaty, iii. i. 34, 28 June 1919.

²⁴Klaus Pabst, Das Problem der deutsch-belgischen Grenze in der Politik der letzten 150 Jahre, *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, 77 (1965), 183–210.

²⁵AA, Eupen-Malmedy, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, L005698–701, *Baron von Lersner to Georges Clemenceau*, 27 December 1919.

Germans.²⁶ In December, Baron Freiherr Kurt von Lersner, who headed the German delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, wrote again to Clemenceau of his amazement that the precise complaints formulated by him about the lack of transparency failed to meet with any sympathy or understanding from the allied governments and their associates.²⁷ He argued how '[t]he German government estimates that one could not talk of a truly free vote as long as the Belgian authorities were 'free to act as they please'. In its letter of 3 October, the German delegation demanded the putting in place of a commission nominated by the League of Nations to oversee the consultation. It also demanded that voting take place within each commune by secret ballot, and that those people originating from the area but living outside it should also be allowed to vote, as was the case in other contested territories such as Schleswig. Germany did not view such recommendations as being out of line with assurances given by the allied governments in June, when they stated that the vote would take place 'under the direction of the League of Nations'.²⁸ However, by November the mere submission by Belgium of the results of the consultation to the League would suffice.²⁹ In respect of Article 34, Clemenceau contended:

It is sufficient to read this article to realise clearly that it was not the intention of the allies and its [sic] associates to organise [sic] a *consultation populaire* in Eupen and in Malmédy [sic] corresponding to those provided for in Upper Silesia and Schleswig, but that their intention was to permit the inhabitants of the districts in question, who might have the desire that their *patrie* stay under German domination, to freely express their wish.³⁰

²⁶AA, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, L005681, Auswärtiges Amt to Stahmer, German Ambassador to London, 26 March 1920.

²⁷AA, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, L005698/701, Baron von Lersner to Georges Clemenceau, 27 December 1919.

²⁸AA, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, L005684/93, Baron von Lersner to Georges Clemenceau, 3 October 1919.

²⁹AA, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, L005698/701, Baron Von Lersner to Georges Clemenceau, 27 December 1919.

³⁰AA, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, L005696–L005697, President Georges Clemenceau to the German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, 10 November 1919; *Le Soir*, 6 December 1919; *La Nation Belge*, 6 December 1919.

If one compares the situation briefly with other plebiscites stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles, one sees a number of inconsistencies, even allowing for the obvious variables such as demographics, geographic location and associated socio-economic conditions.

Schleswig was perhaps the least problematic of all the contested territories to be resolved. Following the war of 1864 with Denmark, Prussia annexed Schleswig. The proposal at that time to hold a plebiscite did not come to fruition. Neither was one held following the defeat of Austria by Prussia, even after the intervention of Napoleon III.³¹ At Versailles in 1919, however, a plebiscite was deemed the most appropriate means of rectifying the frontier between Denmark and Germany. Two zones were created and an international commission was charged with the organization of the plebiscite. Allied troops were deployed to maintain order whilst all German troops and administrators had to evacuate the territory. Two separate and secret plebiscites were eventually held within weeks of the treaty coming into effect. In the first plebiscite, out of the 111,191 people eligible to vote, 101,642 availed themselves of the opportunity and the result was an overwhelming majority in favour of attachment to Denmark. In the second zone, the vast majority of the population voted to remain German. In the East Prussian territories of Allenstein and Marienwerder, a similar arrangement to that which had been designed for Schleswig was adopted. Allenstein, with a population of some 500,000, leaned overwhelmingly towards Germany, whilst Marienwerder, located on the route of the shortest railway line from Warsaw to Danzig, saw another landslide of over 97,000 of the 105,000 eligible voters deciding in favour of Germany. Here again, all voting was by secret ballot.³²

In the case of Upper Silesia, the situation was a good deal more complex, and the outcome contentious, so much so that it contributed to the resignation of the Fehrenbach government in Germany.³³

³¹ Geoffrey Wawro, *The Austro Prussian War: Austria's War with Prussia and Italy in 1866* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 52.

³² Wambaugh, *Plebiscites*, i, 38–45.

³³ The government of Konstantin Fehrenbach (June 1920–April 1921) eventually resigned over the ultimatum on reparations given to his government by the allies following the London Conference in March 1921. William Carr, *A History of Germany, 1815–1990* (4th ed.) (New York & London: Bloomsbury, 1991), 271; F. Llewellyn Jones, *Plebiscites, Transactions of the Grotius Society*, 13 (1927), 172–175.

The conditions laid down for holding of plebiscite were again largely in line with those in the other territories. The annex to Article 88, which dealt with Upper Silesia, required that German troops and officials evacuate the area where the plebiscite was to be held. Any person born in the territory, even if now living elsewhere in Germany, was entitled to vote. The area was divided into four zones. In the end, the turnout exceeded 90%. Whilst a clear majority of the votes cast were in favour of remaining within Germany, the division of the plebiscite area into four zones resulted in a strong majority in the southern zones. The decision in the end to partition Upper Silesia was greeted with disbelief by Germany.³⁴ What is important in terms of this comparison is the modus operandi employed in the execution rather than the result. As we shall see, many of the conditions and safeguards stipulated for the aforementioned plebiscites would not apply to the public expression which took place in Eupen-Malmedy.

During the Treaty negotiations, the American members in the Commission on Danish and Belgian Affairs had proposed that the exercise of any plebiscite should be administered by the League of Nations.³⁵ However, the recommendation was not stipulated in the final draft of the treaty. One would concur with Manfred J. Enssle in his assertion that the eventual recommendation of a public expression of opinion in lieu of a plebiscite made a mockery of the principle of self-determination.³⁶ One cannot overlook the influence of the French chairman of the commission, André Tardieu, who by his own admission was active in supporting Belgium's claims.³⁷ The major difference between the popular consultation and the plebiscites mentioned above was that where the plebiscites allowed for both sides to vote on the future status of a particular region, in the consultation only those who wished to protest against the annexation to Belgium were obliged to take part. This was not done in secret, but instead under the watchful eyes of the local district commissioner and his agents, all of whom were Belgian officials. The powers allocated to the district commissioners in this way gave rise to further concerns

³⁴Jones, *Plebiscites*, 172–174.

³⁵Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 20–24.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 21.

³⁷André Tardieu, *The Truth About the Treaty* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1921), 217–218.

about the transparency of the exercise.³⁸ Baltia would argue long after the period of the consultation had elapsed that he merely observed the ruling of the treaty. This was in essence correct. A vexed Baltia wrote how distinctions between what constituted a plebiscite, a referendum or a public expression of opinion needed to be underlined, 'lest it be said that he or any of his officials did not carry out their duties to the letter of the law'.³⁹

Yet Eupen-Malmedy was not the only instance where the utility of a public expression of opinion was recommended in the aftermath of the Great War. As mentioned previously, not all contested territories were fully catered for within the treaties. The disputed territory of Vilna was one such case. The district of Vilna, coinciding more or less with what today is the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius and its hinterland, was, like Eupen-Malmedy, well accustomed to political instability over a number of centuries. It would once again experience a protracted level of upheaval following Germany's surrender in 1918.⁴⁰ Vilna was historically claimed by both Poland and Lithuania as being intrinsic to either territory. The Poles attached considerable cultural importance to the district from whence a number of Poland's greatest sons had emerged, not least their Chief of State General Piłsudski and their national poet Mickiewicz. For the Lithuanians, Vilna was essential to the economic lifeblood of the country. From the thirteenth century, Lithuania had gradually increased its power and prestige in Eastern Europe until the Lublin conference of 1569 forcibly forged it into a union with Poland.⁴¹ Following the third partition of Poland in 1795, Russia annexed Lithuania, save for a small stretch of territory on the left bank of the River Niemen.⁴² The majority of the inhabitants were White Russians. The territory was also home to Lithuanians, Poles and Jews.⁴³

³⁸Doepgen, *Die Abtretung*, 115–122; Klaus Pabst, 'Eupen Malmedy in der belgischen Regierungs und Parteienpolitik 1914–1940', *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsschriftvereins*, (76) (1964), 9–10.

³⁹Rapport sur l'activité, i, 158.

⁴⁰Wambaugh, *Plebiscites*, i, 298–330 & 547–556.

⁴¹Lithuanian Information Bureau, *The Lithuanian—Polish Dispute: Second Assembly of the League of Nations at Geneva 1921* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1921), 5.

⁴²Wambaugh, *Plebiscites*, i, 298–302.

⁴³*Ibid.*

In 1915, as war raged across Europe, the district of Vilna fell into German hands. Following their evacuation of the city in 1918, Vilna was again fought over by Poland and Lithuania. The Lithuanian State Council declared independence in February 1918 with its capital at Vilna. Within a year, the Bolshevik army had taken the city and the Lithuanian government fled to Kovno. Both Polish and Lithuanian troops redoubled their efforts to retake Vilna. Eventually Polish troops took the city on 20 April 1920. In July, Soviet Russia signed a treaty of peace with Lithuania, recognizing its claim to Vilna. In September, the Polish requested the intervention of the Council of the League of Nations in an effort to prevent war between the two sides.⁴⁴

The dispute between Lithuania and Poland was eventually set for a hearing by the League Council on 16 September 1920 in Paris. A few days later on 19 September, the warring factions consented to a proposal to accept a provisional line of demarcation in order to bring a halt to hostilities, and to enable dialogue to begin. The Vilna plebiscite is all the more interesting a comparison with Eupen-Malmedy as it was Paul Hymans who, formerly as Belgian Foreign Minister and chief plenipotentiary to the Paris Peace Conference and now as the first President of the League of Nations Assembly, invited both parties to consider the holding of a 'public expression of opinion' under the League's supervision. Agreement was eventually reached, albeit not without a good deal of procrastination and obfuscation from both sides. The League Council busied itself with formulating the conditions under which a prospective consultation could take place. The ballot would be secret and one polling booth for every 400 voters was deemed the appropriate ratio. If neither side could agree on the territorial contours in which the consultation should take place, a number of civil commissioners were to be appointed to determine the parameters. An international detachment of British, French, Spanish, Belgian, Dutch, Swedish and Norwegian troops was to occupy the territory for the duration of the consultation. However, the remaining Polish troops under General Żeligowski would first have to withdraw from the region.⁴⁵

⁴⁴The First Assembly of the League of Nations, *A League of Nations*, IV (1) (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1921), 19–20.

⁴⁵Wambaugh, i, 298–302.

By December 1920, the decision had been made to proceed with the public expression of opinion. From that propitious moment onwards, a winter of discontent saw further intransigence on the part of the Poles, and 'repeated reservations' expressed by the Lithuanian side.⁴⁶ On 11 March 1921, the Council effectively declared that the prospective public expression of opinion had been called off, and embarked instead on chairing direct negotiations with the rival claimants in Brussels under the chairmanship of Paul Hymans. This too ended in stalemate. Eventually General Żeligowski called for elections in the disputed district in January 1922, and the end result was a victory for the Polish side. The result, although not recognized by Lithuania, was accepted by the Conference of Ambassadors on 15 March 1923.⁴⁷

One makes mention of this episode here for a number of reasons, not least because, as with Eupen-Malmedy, a public expression of opinion was considered the best option to resolve what was an equally complex situation. Furthermore, the idea to hold a public expression of opinion in the territory was decided upon at the behest of the then head of Belgium's delegation to the Peace Conference, Paul Hymans. Hymans would often interchange the terms public expression of opinion and plebiscite when referring to the Vilna question, as he did when referring to the consultation in Eupen-Malmedy.⁴⁸ In stressing to one Polish representative the need for a transparent consultation, Hymans noted how 'the League of Nations interpreted a plebiscite as a free and honest vote', and urged the Poles to remove their military presence. He furthermore contended that the League of Nations had the right to impose its own conditions on the two parties, as it was intervening to arrive at a final settlement of the problem.⁴⁹ In terms of Eupen-Malmedy, Hymans (albeit in the role of Belgian Foreign Minister) had been less concerned about the safeguards required to ensure 'a free and honest vote'. Such protective measures as were deemed necessary for the Vilna case were not included. Up to and beyond the eve of the popular consultation in Eupen-Malmedy,

⁴⁶Ibid., 328.

⁴⁷W.J. Brockelbank, The Vilna dispute, *The American Journal of International Law*, 20 (3) (July 1926), 494–497.

⁴⁸Wambaugh, i, 312.

⁴⁹Ibid., 308–309.

Germany continued to insist that the allied governments look anew at its recommendations of 3 October 1919.

It furthermore demanded that 'the incomplete and obscure dispositions of article 34 of the Peace Treaty be completed in the spirit of the solemn assurances given on numerous occasions to nominate a League of Nations commission'.⁵⁰ A similar commission had operated in the case of Vilna. What seemed obscure to German eyes was, from a Belgian perspective, in the words of Rolin-Jaequemyns, Belgium's representative on the IARHC, 'wholly clear and wholly simple'.⁵¹

The Belgian delegation protested vigorously to the General Secretary of the Peace Conference, Dutasta, over Germany's objections to the wording of Article 34. They pointed to what they claimed was a flawed German translation of the terms as set out in the treaty. One specific area of confusion was the German delegation's understanding that the public expression of opinion was to take place 'under the direction' of the League of Nations. This was interpreted by the Belgian side as meaning 'under the auspices of the League of Nations'.⁵² In spite of Berlin's persistence in crying foul, Rolin-Jaequemyns believed that the Eupen-Malmedy question was far from a dominant issue among Germans in the Rhineland. Jaequemyns took the view that, to most Germans, the two *Kreise* were as good as lost in the absence of a secret ballot. Although this was seen as nothing less than an injustice, the issue as far as he could see did not have the potential to stir public opinion to any worrying degree. He bluntly wrote to Paul Hymans, noting that 'the Germans attach no importance, be it economic or sentimental to these territories'.⁵³ To Jaequemyns, of more pressing concern to most Germans was

⁵⁰AA, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, L005698–701, Baron Freiherr Von Lersner to Clemenceau, 27 December 1919.

⁵¹AAEB, 10.792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, Secretary General of the Belgian Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, Rolin-Jaequemyns to Secretary General to the Peace Conference, Dutasta, Réponse à la note de la Délégation allemande du 3 octobre 1919, 14 October 1919.

⁵²AA, R76.426, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd. 10, Rolin-Jaequemyns to Dutasta, General Secretary to the Peace Conference, 8 January 1920.

⁵³AAEB, 10.792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, Belgian High Commissioner to the Haute Commission Interalliée des Territoires Rhénans, Rolin-Jaequemyns to Paul Hymans, 4 March 1920; Note from Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission, 'Attitude de l'opinion allemande concernant le retour d'Eupen et Malmedy à la Belgique' Crefeld, 24 March 1920.

the future of Silesia and Germany's Polish territories. Be that as it may, the significance of Eupen-Malmedy as part of the greater European tapestry of contested territories would gain in significance during the inter-war period, as Germany increasingly began to look on it as a loose thread that ought to be pulled, thereby potentially initiating the unravelling of a considerable portion of the Versailles Treaty in the process, particularly with regard to Germany's eastern borders. This approach to the Eupen-Malmedy question was best demonstrated during Gustav Stresemann's virtual ownership of Germany's Foreign Ministry from 1923 to 1929, which shall be discussed in more detail later in this study.⁵⁴

‘A LITTLE BELGIAN FARCE’? THE PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF OPINION

The registers for the public expression of opinion were eventually opened on 26 January 1920 to protestors both male and female who had reached twenty-one years of age either before or during the period of the consultation.⁵⁵ Acquiring the right to vote on such an important issue cannot be overstated. In Belgium, universal male suffrage had been introduced in the nineteenth century, with certain caveats regarding plural voting following the constitutional revision of 1893. Immediately prior to this, barely 140,000 possessed the right to vote. It was only in the post-war years between 1918 and 1921 that universal suffrage took of a more equitable character, at least for the male polity.⁵⁶ In Germany also, the introduction of political reforms in the midst of revolutionary fervour evinced a dramatic transformation. Hence the right to vote,

⁵⁴Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 113–120.

⁵⁵AA, R76.426, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.10; P. Veithen, ‘Die Volksbefragung in Eupen-Malmedy-St. Vith und ihre unmittelbaren Folgen’, *Fédération Archéologique, Historique et Folklorique de Belgique*, XLII congrès, Malmedy, 1972’, *Annales*, II (Malmedy, 1974), 155–163; Pabst, *Eupen Malmedy*, 279–282; ‘Arrêté no.7, Indication des conditions à remplir par les protestataires à participer à la consultation populaire, 26 January 1920’, in *Recueil des Décrets, Arrêtes & avis 10 Janvier au 10 Juillet 1920* (hereafter, *Recueil*, i) (Stavelot, 1920); AA, R76418, Akten betreffend die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd. 2–3, L005966–7, ‘Arrêté relative à la consultation populaire’, 26 January 1920.

⁵⁶Carl Henrik Höjer, *Le régime parlementaire belge de 1918 à 1940* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1946), 32–39.

let alone on such an important issue, was a new development for most inhabitants.⁵⁷

Only two registers were opened to facilitate those eligible to vote. Both were located at the district commissioners' offices in Eupen and Malmedy. These were to remain open between the hours of nine and twelve noon, and between two and four in the afternoon. On public holidays, they were to open for the first half of the day only. Baltia issued instructions to the district commissioners that anyone who had come to the territory after 1 August 1914 would be prohibited from taking part in the consultation. Any attempt to provide false information would be punishable by a fine of between 500 and 1,000 Belgian francs.⁵⁸ The German ambassador to Belgium, Otto Göppert, charged that the decree was in direct contravention of the terms of the treaty, as no specific form of identification was specified. He furthermore alleged that 'the district commissioners openly refuse[d] to provide information on this question'.⁵⁹

Throughout the course of the consultation, numerous allegations of intimidation by the Belgian authorities were highlighted by both German and neutral observers alike. One German newspaper noted how what it termed 'the political police' was so prevalent that cars followed the electric trams bound for Aachen, stopping them to look for suspects among the passengers.⁶⁰ The radio service from Nauen in Germany had already warned listeners a few months earlier that the administrative controller in Eupen was threatening to throw the first voter down the stairs who dared to come to sign the register.⁶¹ He was also alleged to have threatened to close the registry office if too many people came to vote. Lack of access to the registers was to be a recurring complaint throughout the period of the consultation, whether due to the distance of the registers from people's homes, or the arbitrary manner by which the stated opening hours were observed. In an open letter addressed

⁵⁷Die Wahlen zum preussischen Abgeordnetenhaus in der Stadt Eupen zur Zeit des deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871–1918, *Geschichtliches Eupen*, XXXV (2001), 119–137.

⁵⁸AA, R76418, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd. 2–3, L005966–7; AAEB, 10.792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, Instructions aux commissaires du district.

⁵⁹AA, R76.425, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.9, Göppert to Auswärtiges Amt, 17 December 1920.

⁶⁰*Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 25 October 1919.

⁶¹AAEB, 10/792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, Transcript from Radio Nauen, 8 October 1919.

to Baltia from a group described as ‘the inhabitants of Eupen and Malmedy’, the legitimacy of his regime was brought into question.

But how can we have trust in someone like you? You are already breaking your most solemn promises continuously, when your major interest should be in winning us over. Imagine, how we will be cheated and violated, if Belgium really annexes us.⁶²

The Eupen-Malmedy government was equally concerned about the impact that events across the border in Germany might have on the consultation. Adolf Köster became German foreign minister in April 1920, and in his maiden speech he demanded guarantees from Belgium that a completely free plebiscite would be allowed to take place. He spoke of the loyalty of the vast majority of the people of those cantons, ‘who preferred to eat black bread with the Germans rather than white bread with the Belgians’.⁶³ Addressing the Reichstag chamber, he stated:

The German people will never recognise in the bottom of their heart [sic] the results of plebiscites which the Peace Treaty imposed on it. All of these plebiscites operate at a time when our country is crushed.⁶⁴

For Köster, the choice was not simply between Belgium and Germany, but between a victorious nation and a defeated one. ‘Hence’, he continued, ‘the question to discover if a heart wishes to be German, or Danish or Belgian or Polish is deformed by circumstances, and is transformed into a simple economic calculation into a question of money.’⁶⁵ Inside Belgium, the POB was adamant from early on that a secret ballot should be held in place of the open process of registration, as the population were not being ‘honestly consulted’. Louis de Brouckère wrote in his party’s newspaper, *Le Peuple*, that any annexation without the express consent of the population would be ‘tantamount to rape, and something

⁶²AA, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, ‘Offener Brief an Herrn General Lieutenant Baltia’ *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 February 1920.

⁶³Gessler Köster, Maiden speech to the Reichstag, 20 April 1920, cited in *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 August 1920.

⁶⁴*Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 August 1920.

⁶⁵AAEB, 10.792/II/2217/823, Eupen-Malmedy, Count de Kerchove de Denterghem to Hymans, 21 April 1920.

which the Socialists could not allow to happen'.⁶⁶ De Brouckère's emotive use of the word 'rape' was controversial to say the least, when one considers the recent wartime experiences of Belgium's vulnerable population and the extensive use of the phrase 'the rape of Belgium' to denote the barbarity of the German invasion and the oppressive occupation that followed.⁶⁷ The German press took full advantage of such statements by respected Belgian politicians, giving further credence to their argument that a fairer system of consultation was needed. In this light, the situation in Eupen-Malmedy attracted considerable international attention also. A journalist with the *Manchester Guardian* based in Malmedy prior to and during the period of consultation began his serial reportage by prefacing that:

I am unable to mention the names of the many people who supplied me with personal information, or to give precise details, because everyone with whom I spoke implored me not to mention names or particulars that might lead to discovery or victimisation.⁶⁸

This 'fear of discovery' was something that would continue to inscribe itself on to the psyche of the population for many decades to come. During the weeks and months leading up to the public expression of opinion, a concerted effort had been made to weed out suspected propagandists. Denunciation of certain individuals by neighbours or erstwhile adversaries was commonplace, and if the allegation involved propagandizing in favour of Germany, this resulted in expulsion from the territory. Quite often such denunciations had their origin not in political partisanship, but in personal vendettas, providing an opportunity for the settling of scores, often over some trivial matter. One young teacher, Fraulein Steinmetz, who taught at the *École pour Jeunes Filles* in Malmedy, was relieved of her duties having been denounced by a local, whose daughter had recently been disciplined by the teacher. Her colleague, Fraulein Gall, was also dismissed and given three days to leave the territory for disseminating pro-German tracts.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Louis de Brouckère cited in *Le Peuple*, 2 June 1919.

⁶⁷John Horne & Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 32–33.

⁶⁸*Manchester Guardian*, 17 & 18 May 1920.

⁶⁹*Vorwärts*, 25 October 1919.

Women who went to sign the register in the district commissioner's office were often subjected to verbal abuse. Usually, the protester stood alone in front of the district commissioner and perhaps one or two other male officials.⁷⁰ On one occasion, a young female clerk from Eupen had gone to sign the register in early May. Before being allowed to do so, she was asked to explain herself. The woman insisted that she was under no obligation to reply to such a question. It was quickly made clear to her, however, that on this occasion she would not be allowed to protest except on 'valid grounds'. She eventually replied that she wished to remain German, and was only then allowed to sign the register. Having signed, she was then jeered at by the officials as she left the district commissioner's office.⁷¹

The civil authorities found the interrogation of would-be protesters prior to their signing the register useful in measuring the degree of pressure being imposed on them by the German authorities. A gendarme from Raeren by the name of Würsig had alleged been given orders from the German government to protest against the annexation. He confessed to Xhaflaire's assistant baron, Jules de Grand Ry, that he had not wished to protest of his own accord 'because I do not wish to make an affront'.⁷² Karl Wolff, a thirty-year-old railway employee, was promised a transfer if he signed the register. While Wolff did eventually protest, there was, however, always the option of changing one's mind. Almost two months to the day, Wolff returned to the district commissioner's office to reverse his decision. According to the district commissioner, Léon Xhaflaire, Wolff's initial decision had been 'spontaneous'.⁷³ However, this was not the full story. One desperate letter sent to the *Regierungspräsident* in Aachen shows the hopelessness felt by individuals who themselves merely obeyed the rules of the consultation. Michael Leyens went to sign the register on 20 February. Having done so, he soon found himself prohibited from changing German currency into

⁷⁰AA, R7.6419, Die Abstimmung in Eupen Malmedy, Bd.3–4, L006040, 'Sehr verehrtes Fräulein!: Abschrift.'

⁷¹*Manchester Guardian*, 18 May 1920.

⁷²AAEB, 11.443/3413, La consultation populaire, Würsig to Assistant-Commissioner for Eupen, Baron Jules de Grand Ry, Bureau du Commissaire du District d'Eupen, 30 April 1920.

⁷³AAEB, 11.443/978, La consultation populaire, Commissaire de District Léon Xhaflaire to Haut-Commissaire Royal Baltia, 19 June 1920.

Belgian francs. In addition, his entitlement to foodstuffs from the *comité de ravitaillement*, which oversaw the distribution of rations, was revoked. 'As a result of these measures', he wrote, 'my business is ruined, soon an expulsion order will arrive.' Numerous other incidents were recorded by the German *Regierungspräsident's* office. A number of burgomasters sympathetic to Germany informed the *Auswärtiges Amt* of an increasing number of Belgian agents operating in both districts.⁷⁴

Whether deprived of certain vital privileges by the Belgian authorities or threatened with losing one's livelihood by the German authorities and exposed to acts of intimidation from both sides, people were simply unsure which way to turn. It would thus be one's own personal and familial situation which would dictate the future for many. Economically and socially, Belgium perhaps looked the better option, considering the reparations and restrictions being placed on Germany. Many who did not sign the register may have adopted a wait and see approach, and therefore decided that the best thing to do was to do nothing.

Xhaflaire also met with the *Manchester Guardian's* on-site reporter. He insisted that most officials and employers had indicated to him that nearly all the inhabitants were in favour of the annexation by Belgium, especially the people of the farming community. Xhaflaire was anxious to point out how he himself was also 'extraordinarily popular' and how he had received numerous letters of support from locals. He had even been asked to become honorary president of a local rabbit-breeding club. As suggested by the *Manchester Guardian*, 'What better proof of popularity could be desired?'⁷⁵

When asked to explain Belgium's claim to Eupen-Malmedy, Xhaflaire retorted: 'All sorts of claims!' He went on to elaborate on how both districts were 'quite Belgian in culture', but this reasoning was soon overtaken by his emphasis on the need to make good the loss of forestry, due to the destruction of vast swathes of Belgian forestry by the German army during the war. There were also strategic military concerns and 'besides', he added, 'the inhabitants themselves want us [...] at least two thirds do. They actually petitioned us to come.'⁷⁶

⁷⁴AA, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, Petition to the Regierungspräsident, Aachen, 7 March 1920.

⁷⁵*Manchester Guardian*, 18 May 1920.

⁷⁶Commissaire du District Léon Xhaflaire cited in *Manchester Guardian*, 18 May 1920.

By mid-May, just 77 protesters had signed the registers. Most of the names were those of railway employees. ‘Anyone is free to come and protest’, Xhaflaire interjected, as the reporter leafed through the eight pages filled thus far with protestors’ names. ‘But they don’t come—they don’t want to be German, that’s the reason.’ The English reporter confessed to being ‘mystified’ by the insignificant number of protestors who had signed against the annexation. He had already been in both Eupen and in Malmedy for a number days, and had spoken with ‘farmers, workmen, businessmen, priests, officials, shopkeepers, schoolteachers’, but he failed to come across a single voice in favour of becoming Belgian. One local resident from Eupen, described in one of his articles as ‘highly educated’, told the journalist that he personally knew of many more people who had gone to protest, but whether or not they had all been admitted he could not say. Many who attempted to protest had to wait for hours before being allowed to sign. It was not unusual to be refused admission either.

I don’t deny that comparatively few have gone, though not as few as 77. It’s too dangerous. It’s the duty of everyone to go. I haven’t gone, but I shall go. I’ve been living here for 23 years, and I don’t want to leave my home, but if I protest I fear that things will be made so unpleasant for me that I shall have to leave.⁷⁷

He continued:

For most Eupeners exile would mean ruin. They daren’t protest. If we had a fair chance, if we could vote secretly – or if a British or American officer were put in charge of the list, and we were safe against victimisation, we would be satisfied. We don’t want revision of the Peace Treaty, but we do want the Peace Treaty to be interpreted fairly – that is all.⁷⁸

When Wilhelm Benker, the personal secretary to the *Bürgermeister* of Bütgenbach, went to the district commissioner’s office in Malmedy to sign the register on the afternoon of 23 February, he found it closed. A half hour later, the district commissioner Schnorrenberg arrived.

⁷⁷‘Eupen and Malmedy, The inhabitants and transference to Belgium’, *Manchester Guardian*, 17 May 1920.

⁷⁸*Manchester Guardian*, 17 May 1920.

Schnorrenberg told Benker that it was only from Bütgenbach that protestors seemed to be emanating, and that it was thus fair to assume that something was 'not quite right' there.⁷⁹ Baltia's administration feared that some kind of conspiracy was afoot in Bütgenbach and armed cyclist units were employed to scour the countryside for suspicious activity. A form of secret police activity was also in operation in the area. A company of cyclists had been put on alert for fear of the situation 'getting out of control' as the consultation continued.⁸⁰ Benker explained that he was protesting as an individual who, after twenty-four years of service to the German state, now suddenly found his situation seriously compromised. Schnorrenberg warned Benker that if he went through with his protest, he would not be able to change his marks for Belgian francs and that from the following day he would be unable to obtain any form of food relief. When asked to give three reasons why he wished to sign the register, both he and the commissioner entered into a discussion on Germany's and Belgium's contrasting historical claims to the contested territory. Schnorrenberg insisted that Benker not sign the register, and that he go quietly about his business. Benker was adamant that he did not wish to work under a Belgian authority and duly signed the register of protest. As he was still a local government functionary, he was obliged the following day to sign a statement of loyalty to the Belgian state, but he 'temporarily refused', on the grounds that members of the population were being deprived of foodstuffs and the right to change German marks for francs. Instead, Benker travelled to Berlin to inform the authorities there of his experience with the district commissioner. A report was also sent to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin. When he arrived back at his office in Bütgenbach, a letter awaited him stating that he was forthwith relieved of his duties as secretary to the burgomaster, Werden. Benker's dismissal, however, was not due to his refusal to sign the register of

⁷⁹The highest protest vote both in per capita and real terms was in Lontzen-Herbesthal where, out of a population of 1041, just 63 people signed the register. Nevertheless, Bütgenbach had been clearly identified by Baltia's officials as an incubator of dissent. Lucien Colson, *Malmedy et les territoires rétrocédés* (Liège: Joseph Olivier, 1921), 6–7.

⁸⁰Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK), Sammlung Benker, Zsg.104/3, Tagesbuch Wilhelm Benker, 29 February 1920.

protest but rather because he had not made the statement of loyalty to the Belgian state.⁸¹

In the meantime, other local authority members had resigned in protest, including two police sergeants, Sody and Pitzer, as well as another official by the name of Simon.⁸² On 27 February, the burgomaster of Eupen resigned in protest against the ongoing intimidation of inhabitants by the Belgian authorities. In light of this development, Schnorrenberg telephoned Benker and told him that his tenure of office was to be extended by four more days. Benker asked for some time to consider the offer, as he was not quite sure of the implications, both in the eyes of his German superiors, and the Belgian authorities. Later that day, the military gendarmerie chief Noerdinger in Elsenborn made clear to Benker that it was not a matter of choice. Benker insisted that only a written command was a valid way of enforcing such an order. Noerdinger complied by doing just that. It soon transpired, however, that such military commands had been outlawed by Baltia in a decree of 13 January, except in instances of billeting. Thus, Benker appealed against the order and the matter found its way to Baltia's office. A delegation of five military officials met with Baltia on 29 February and advised him to seek an amicable solution to the situation.⁸³

The following day, Baltia met with a delegation of councillors from Bütgenbach. He quickly rejected calls for the reinstatement of Sody, Pitzer and Simon. However, he recommended that Benker's dismissal be reversed, on the condition that he make a full declaration of loyalty to the Belgian state. It seemed to Benker that Baltia and his cohorts had taken time to give 'sober reflection' to what was an ever-worsening situation in the districts. If it were to get any worse, perhaps Baltia's own position as governor could come under scrutiny. It was only following such a calculation, Benker believed, that the offer to reinstate him was made. 'One would certainly have otherwise done without my further employment, as I would also prefer not to have resumed my service', he wrote in his diary.

⁸¹ BAK, Sammlung Benker, Zsg.104/3, Tagesbuch Benker, 24 February 1920.

⁸² Ibid., 28 February 1920.

⁸³ BAK, Sammlung Benker, Zsg.104/3, Tagesbuch Benker, 28 February 1920; Doepgen, 123–128.

But Benker too had to consider things carefully. Breaking his solidarity with the other officials, he believed that it would have been far more detrimental to the German community of Bütgenbach to leave it solely in the hands of the Belgians.⁸⁴ He particularly feared the imposition of martial law in the town and its hinterland if this were to happen. Benker duly agreed to sign an oath of loyalty. Baltia reciprocated by agreeing to rescind the impositions placed on Benker, including the prohibition on him to exchange marks. He was furthermore again allowed to receive the ration of basic foodstuffs, which were still channelled through the *comité de ravitaillement*. Baltia suggested to Benker that if he had not gone to sign the register of protest initially, he would have surely been in line to take over as mayor of Bütgenbach. However, Benker retorted that he did not intend serving permanently as a functionary of the Belgian state.⁸⁵ The new burgomaster of Bütgenbach, Reiner Doutrelpont, took office on 5 March. Both sides at least had given some ground but the atmosphere would remain tense for the foreseeable future.

As with Wilhelm Benker, throughout Eupen and Malmedy people frequently faced difficult decisions, the most pressing of which was whether to submit silently to the pressures being imposed by the current regime, or risk their livelihoods by protesting. One Walloon workman, when questioned on the importance of the popular consultation, stated how:

In any case the plebiscite is a mere pretence, and no one takes it seriously now. I haven't protested, and don't intend doing so because I know it's dangerous and useless. We have simply been annexed by Belgium, and there's an end to the matter. I am a German Walloon and a Socialist. If things had gone the other way we Germans would have done in Belgium just what the Belgians are doing here. Nationalism's [sic] the same everywhere. We German Walloons all want to remain German, not because we have anything against the Belgians nor because we are particularly proud of Germany, but because certain material interests are affected, and because annexation will affect many of us very hard. It is true that we have a few capitalists and war profiteers who want to become Belgian, but that is only because they want to escape the heavy German taxes.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ BAK, Sammlung Benker, Zsg.104/3, Tagesbuch Benker, 1 March 1920.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 May 1920.

This response appears as objective and open as one could dare to expect from any individual during such a precarious period, when one considers the extreme propaganda at play from both sides.

To counter the threat by German propagandists, regulations on the circulation of inhabitants between Eupen-Malmedy and the Rhineland on the one hand, and Belgium on the other, were examined anew in early March. All inhabitants needed their identity card to bear the *cachet trilingue* (trilingual stamp) when entering Germany.⁸⁷ This had to be done at the office of the burgomaster. Persons wishing to enter Malmedy from Germany now needed special authorization from the *bureau de circulation*. Exceptions were made for those who worked in Eupen-Malmedy by day and returned to Germany in the evening. Employers also had to notify the district commissioner if such an individual ceased to be an employee.⁸⁸

According to Article 36 of the Versailles Treaty, once Belgian sovereignty became definitive, German nationals habitually resident in the territories before 1 August 1914 would acquire Belgian nationality, whilst those who came to the territory after that date could not become Belgian without the permission of the Belgian government. Nevertheless, within two years of the sovereign transfer taking effect, all German nationals over eighteen years of age and habitually resident in the territory could still opt to keep their German nationality. A husband who opted for this would, by implication, decide for his wife and children. Those who did so had one year in which to leave the territory and find an alternative residence inside Germany.⁸⁹

In an *arrêté* issued on 18 March, which unashamedly began with the sentence, ‘In order to allow me to exert control over the population of the territories of Eupen and Malmedy’, Baltia demanded that those who had taken up residence in the *cercles* after 1 August 1914, and who continued to be resident there, would have to present themselves before a delegated authority chosen by him and give an indication as to whether they planned to stay in the territory. Those individuals affected by the

⁸⁷AA, R764.26, Akten betreffend die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.10, Identity card.

⁸⁸AAEB, 11.443, La consultation populaire, *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*, internal memo, 17 December 1920.

⁸⁹*The Treaty of Versailles*, iii. i. 36.

arrêté had to provide proof of authorization of residence, which had to be obtained from the *bureau de circulation*. Failure to abide by the measure would result in a fine of fifty francs, or a stay of ten to fifteen days in prison. The *arrêté* did not apply to Belgian subjects who had settled there after that date.⁹⁰ Criticism of this measure was swift, as in practice it demanded that these particular German subjects decide within a space of four weeks whether or not they wished to opt for Belgian nationality. In the event of not doing so, or if their requests were denied, those affected would have to leave their homes within the month. The German authorities were outraged by the move, and saw it as a further sign of heavy-handedness by Baltia and his agents.⁹¹ While the consultation was now very much under way, a number of outstanding issues served to heighten tensions in the territory.

In Eupen, the first few weeks of the period of transition were greeted with work stoppages and strikes, which the government blamed upon pro-German agents originating in Cologne and Aachen, with the support of management, most notably in the railway service.⁹² The first meeting of the Delimitation Commission took place on 2 February 1920, just one week after its inception as per the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The purpose and aims of the commission were outlined in Article 35 of the treaty. Essentially, its mission was to trace a frontier acceptable to all sides, which took account of local exigencies and interests. It also had room to renegotiate a certain degree of territory already granted to both Belgium and Germany.⁹³

Paralleling the attempt at national realignment was that of realigning rail links between Belgian towns and those of the Eupen-Malmedy region, not least the Herbesthal–Trois Vierges line which took in Eupen. It also meant re-establishing the line linking Eupen to the town

⁹⁰Arrêté no. 32, 18 March 1920, *Recueil*, i, 55.

⁹¹AAEB, 10.792/III, Eupen-Malmedy, 1919–1922, Göppert to Clemenceau, 15 May 1920.

⁹²‘Unruhen in Eupen,’ *Eupener Nachrichten*, 17 April 1920; AA, R76.426, Akten betreffend die Abstimmung in Eupen- Malmedy, L005914, Bd.10, ‘Citizens of Aachen’.

⁹³The Commission was to comprise seven members in total, of which five members were to be nominated by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and one each by Belgium and Germany. Treaty of Versailles, iii. 35, 28 June 1919.

of Dolhain in ‘old Belgium’.⁹⁴ In the case of the Herbesthal line, the track passed through the town of Monschau (Montjoie), which had been granted to Germany under the terms of the treaty. This was problematic for Belgium in terms of attempting to gain a firm foothold in the region, according to Nestor Crahay, the Minister for Agriculture. The imposing military camp of Elsenborn was also situated near this area and therefore the Belgian delegation in Paris needed to be more proactive in how it could ensure its acquisition. Up to this point, Eupen was linked by tram to Aachen and therefore ‘the traffic needed to be turned towards Belgium’.⁹⁵

Furthermore, the railway track between Trois Vierges in Belgium and Aachen in Germany cut through the territory of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg travelling towards Malmedy. It traversed the territory of Prüm in the Rhineland to return again to Malmedy, cutting a loop around the Our River. It then travelled to Kalterherberg in Germany, returning again to Rötgen near Eupen, before crossing German territory once more between Raeren and Walheim. In order to go from Trois Vierges to Aachen, it was thus necessary to cross the Belgian–German border no fewer than five times.⁹⁶ This posed a number of security problems for the Belgian side particularly. Baltia feared that German activists would take advantage of the situation. The Belgian government now sought to ensure that the entire line of track remained inside Belgian territory. This necessitated a further annexation of territory around the station town of Montjoie-Monschau. Belgium was willing to consider territorial concessions to Germany in relation to this question, but such moves would have had further repercussions on the ground for many of the inhabitants.

⁹⁴AAEB, 10.792/I/39, Eupen-Malmedy, Baron Moncheur to Minister for Railways, 26 May 1919; AAEB, 10/792/I/81/4347, Eupen-Malmedy, Baron Moncheur, to Camille Jacquart, Directeur des services administratifs de l’armée d’occupation, G.Q.G., 26 May 1919.

⁹⁵AAEB, 10.792/I/2273, Eupen-Malmedy, Directeur Général des Eaux et des Forêts Nestor Crahay to Baron Moncheur, MAE., 26 May 1919; AAEB, 10/792/I/2270, Eupen-Malmedy, Crahay to Baron Moncheur, MAE, 26 May 1919.

⁹⁶AAEB, 10.792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, Note sur Eupen et Malmedy: Raisons qui justifiaient dans les cercles d’Eupen et de Malmedy une consultation populaire différente de celles organisées pour le Slesvig, la Silésie etc. [no date].

At its meeting on 27 March 1920, the Delimitation Commission made a 'unanimous' decision with only one dissenting voice (that of Germany) to attribute the Raeren–Kalterherberg railway line to Belgium. Berlin accused the Delimitation Commission of exceeding its remit and so the decision was put before the Council of Ambassadors in Paris, which oversaw the implementation of the treaty.⁹⁷ In a letter to the Council of Ambassadors dated 16 April, Germany again protested against the decision.⁹⁸ By July, the Council of Ambassadors had finished its deliberations and rejected the German claims, thus endorsing the decision of the Delimitation Commission, stating that it had been taken in virtue of the stipulations of the Versailles Treaty and 'necessitated by the economic situation and the railway lines'.⁹⁹

The granting of the Raeren–Kalterherberg railway line to Belgium was just one of a number of contentious issues, which gave rise to open street protests in Eupen and Aachen in April 1920, midway through the consultation process. Their highly charged political nature resulted in certain demands being made of Baltia's government. Complaints were raised about the inhuman treatment of workers from the territory employed in the Belgian occupied zone in Germany. Specific criticisms were voiced over the 'referendum' and its non-secret nature. In addition, a number of proposed changes to the education system, matters concerning policing, the outlawing of meetings, as well as the extradition of certain individuals from the territory, were given a public airing. Belgium's sheer indifference to the protests previously made by the German delegation was also cited. As well as this, the difficulties of commuting from the cantons into Germany were also raised by the protesters. The first of these demonstrations took place in Eupen.¹⁰⁰

On the evening of 14 April, Baltia sent a telegram to the Belgian prime minister about a general strike that had broken out in Eupen, Herbesthal and Monschau. To defuse the situation, a delegation headed by the *chef du cabinet*, Major Daufresne de la Chevalerie, was sent to

⁹⁷The Council of Ambassadors comprised the ambassadors of Japan, Italy and the U.K. in Paris and the French Foreign Minister.

⁹⁸AAEB, 10.792/III/5278, Eupen-Malmedy, Paul Hymans to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 25 May 1920; Doepgen, *Die Abtretung*, 163–165.

⁹⁹AA, R76.449, Grenze Belgien-Deutschland, Bd. 4–5, Internal note of the M.A.E., [no date but end of November 1920].

¹⁰⁰'Notre frontière avec l'Allemagne' *La Libre Belgique*, 10 February 1920.

Eupen. Daufresne immediately made it clear to the protestors that, if necessary, the new regime would use force to suppress the strikes. Major Daufresne indicated that a ‘neutral zone’ would be set up under the control of numerous troops if the strikers would not relent. Daufresne met with workers as well as representatives of the railway company, and the burgomaster of Eupen, Count Graf von Metternich, in a bid to resolve the issue. It soon became clear to Daufresne that the strikes were the work of political agitators in Cologne, and that a certain German agent by the name of Pontzen was on the ground in Eupen looking to stir trouble.

Having come into the possession of a telegram confirming his suspicions, Daufresne gave an order for Pontzen’s immediate arrest. When Daufresne resumed negotiations with workers’ representatives the following day, he was met with an ultimatum that if Pontzen was not released, then no hope of a return to work would be possible. The general vehemently refused to consider the release of the German agent and responded by threatening the burgomaster and certain workers’ representatives with imprisonment if the strikes were not lifted by Saturday morning. Not one to take half-measures, Daufresne showed those assembled an *arrêté* indicating that Eupen and Herbesthal were to be put under a state of siege. As they looked at each other across the table, a rather animated Daufresne picked up the telephone and, calling the army barracks at Verviers, demanded that the fourth infantry battalion be put on standby for Eupen. In reality, such a move was a last resort. This was not the kind of start either he or Baltia would have wished for the nascent administration.¹⁰¹ Wasting no time, Daufresne called on Metternich to get ready a proclamation calling on the protestors to break the strike.¹⁰² By then, the tension had heightened somewhat, as the fallout threatened to spill over into Malmedy. Meanwhile in St Vith, the railway personnel were merely ‘waiting for the word to declare a strike’. As a result of what Baltia termed ‘energetic measures’, Metternich soon capitulated, and within twenty-four hours the strikes had ended.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹AAEB, 10.792/II/1748/614, Eupen-Malmedy, Herman Baltia to Léon Delacroix, 15 April 1920.

¹⁰²Rapport sur l’activité, i, 18.

¹⁰³AAEB, 10.792/II/1963, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Delacroix, 16 April 1920.

The following day, a 'sympathy strike' took place across the border in Aachen.¹⁰⁴ Around 30,000 protestors flocked to the Blücherplatz, where they lodged protests against restrictions on the exchange of marks, which had adversely affected the livelihoods of most people in the region, especially those with jobs in Aachen. Eupeners working in Aachen also demanded a secret ballot, under the watchful eye of neutral observers. The effects of the Belgian education initiatives in the Rhineland as well as in Eupen-Malmedy were also raised. The feared detachment of Eupen and Malmedy from the bishopric of Cologne was a further cause for concern.¹⁰⁵ Another rally was planned for ten o'clock the following morning. In reaction to the violent scenes which took place in Aachen, a number of security measures were introduced by the Rhineland Commission. It was forbidden for more than five people to gather at a time in one place, and cafés were now ordered to shut for eight days at nine o'clock in the evening instead of eleven. Failure to abide by these regulations would see the transgressor either imprisoned or fined up to 10,000 marks.¹⁰⁶

Belgian observers believed that the extent of the unrest in Aachen was fuelled in no small way by the passive attitude of the local police force, now under the command of the former *Landrat* of Malmedy, Freiherr von Korff. Writing to Hymans shortly after the strikes had dissipated, Rolin-Jacquemyns claimed that Baltia had shown a little too much indulgence toward the former *Landrat*, in contrast to the marked caution shown by General Michel. He considered it fortunate that the Christian Syndicates, who were extremely powerful in the Rhineland, had not piled their weight behind the present disturbances:

This attitude certainly contributed to the maintenance of order in the Belgian zone of occupation. If they now in turn began to act when all of Germany is boiling over and when an army of 80,000 men of the *Reichswehr* are camped in the Ruhr basin and in the hands of militarists it's a further worry.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴AAEB, 10.792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Delacroix, Telegram, 17 April 1920.

¹⁰⁵AAEB, 10.792/II/1748/614, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Delacroix, 15 April 1920.

¹⁰⁶*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, 19 April 1920.

¹⁰⁷AAEB, 10.792/II/63, Eupen-Malmedy, Rolin-Jacquemyns to Paul Hymans, 18 April 1920.

Criticism was also levelled at Baltia. Far from replacing Prussian austerity with a more liberal Belgian regime, it was suggested that ‘the inhabitants of the two districts had succumbed to the power of Belgian militarism’.¹⁰⁸ Baltia’s reliance on force to quell the strikes at Eupen and Aachen was portrayed by the German press as a portent of things to come. Meanwhile, tensions continued to rise in Aachen where instances of Belgian soldiers arbitrarily dishing out beatings regularly appeared in the German press. It was a different set of circumstances for those Belgian soldiers who found themselves keeping the peace in Eupen and Malmedy among people who acted and sounded like the inhabitants of the Rhineland, but were in effect Belgians in waiting. This was no easy undertaking for the soldiers sent there, many of whose families had suffered at the hands of their ‘newfound brothers’.

During this time, the nascent German republic had to deal with violent challenges to its legitimacy. The attempt by an ousted Prussian general by the name of Wolfgang Kapp to instigate a coup aimed at bringing down the nascent republic tested the new government’s resolve.¹⁰⁹ One of the chief reasons cited by Kapp was the decision to disarm the *Frei Korps* in order to meet Germany’s military obligations in the Versailles Treaty. However, the putsch failed when the socialists and union leaders organized a general strike in support of the government. These incidents were accompanied by uprisings in Bavaria and Saxony as well as in the Ruhr, where over 1,000 German workers were killed during protests.¹¹⁰

In Aachen, the press spared little ink in castigating the loss of the Raeren–Kalterherberg line to Belgium, which was as much an umbilical cord to the region’s economy as it was to the very culture and interconnectedness of the town and communities through which it ran. Such a decision was considered in contradiction to the treaty, as it constituted a cession of German territory and of German people, which very much disadvantaged the economic life of Aachen. Furthermore, the placing of

¹⁰⁸AAEB, 10.792/II/1986, Eupen-Malmedy, Belgian delegate to the IARHC at Aachen to the Belgian High Commissioner in Koblenz, 30 April 1920.

¹⁰⁹James Joll, *Europe Since 1870: An International History* (London: Penguin, 1990) (4th ed.), 252–253; Carr, *A History of Germany*, 263–264.

¹¹⁰Margaret Pawley, *The Watch on the Rhine: The Military Occupation of the Rhineland* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 42–43.

the reservoir which fed Aachen into Belgian territory was, according to the local workers in Aachen, nothing short of a catastrophe.¹¹¹

As the measures introduced to limit cross-border interference in the districts took hold, an increasing number of expulsion orders were issued.¹¹² The *Regierungsassessor* for Eupen-Malmedy, Graf Mutaschka, reported to Dr Voigt at the *Auswärtiges Amt* in May on the effects that the measures were having on the populace. One individual, Joseph Kirschvinck, a baker from Aachen, had moved to Raeren (in the district of Eupen) in 1919 to work as an agricultural labourer. Although both his paternal and maternal relations all lived in Eupen, he was deemed unsuitable for residency and was served with an expulsion order.¹¹³ A report to the German Foreign Ministry entitled *The Belgian Terror in Eupen* (*Die belgische Terror in Eupen*) described 'the nervousness' and tension that hung in the air during this time. The report claimed that the expulsion of the union activist Pontzen was in effect the result of a Belgian ruse to divert attention from its own less than admirable actions during the consultation. Mutaschka also alleged that the Belgian authorities had benefited from the cooperation of a number of locals who had little problem in denouncing their neighbours, and indeed may even have been collecting information on behalf of the authorities. These 'scum of the population', wrote Mutaschka, were invariably 'priests, councillors and reporters'.¹¹⁴

One such local suspected of spying for the Belgians was a curate by the name of Joseph Caffitz based in Rocherath (Krinkelt), in the district of Malmedy. On one occasion, Caffitz informed the Belgian authorities that a local teacher from the area by the name of Brendgens, who

¹¹¹AAEB, 10.792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, De Radzitzky to Lieutenant General Commandant, Koblenz, 14 April 1920.

¹¹²AA, R76.419, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, L006011, Regierungsassessor Graf Mutaschka to Dr Voigt, 6 May 1920; L006015–L006017, Die belgische Terror in Eupen [Report], 6 May 1920.

¹¹³AA, R76.419, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, L006014, Expulsion order issued by the Haut Commissariat des territoires réunis à la Belgique to Joseph Kirschvinck, May 1920; AA, R76.419, Akten betreffend die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.3, A typical expulsion order signed by the District Commissioner of Malmedy, Schnorrenberg, 22 April 1920. On receipt of an expulsion order, the subject had just fifteen days to depart for Germany.

¹¹⁴AA, R76.419, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, L006015–L006017, Die belgische Terror in Eupen [Report], 6 May 1920.

was lodging in a nearby farm, had in his possession a number of lists containing names of people who wished to protest, but only in secret. The burgomaster of Rocherath, Jansen, was also arrested on the word of Caffitz and taken to Malmédy for the same offence. Following his release later that evening, Jansen paid a visit to the curate. He stormed up to Caffitz's door, shouting: 'Tell me who the traitor is in this place!' Caffitz collected himself for a moment before answering: 'I don't know, but you should not go to people with voting lists, it is not wise to get involved in politics here.'¹¹⁵ The German authorities kept a close eye on Caffitz. They observed how he was the only cleric to display the Belgian flag on King Albert's birthday. He was also quite active in local politics, and suggested at one council meeting that German newspapers should be banned from the territory, as 'they only militated against the Belgian government'. He was also believed to have called for the establishment of a pro-Belgian German language newspaper to combat German irredentist propaganda.¹¹⁶

Information on the potential for dissident activity was also gathered through the activities of secret agents. German Foreign Minister von Simons wrote to the Secretary General of the League of Nations Sir Eric Drummond in February 1921, highlighting the activities of a secret agent who had been arrested by the German authorities. The agent admitted that he had been in the employ of Brussels and had acted with the full knowledge and support of Baltia's government. Christian Sand operated as an *agent provocateur* in Eupen-Malmédy from November 1919 to September 1920. Sand later put together a hastily prepared memoir based on his various missions during that time. He told how under the cover of pseudonyms, and being regularly issued with false papers, he had gained the trust of numerous inhabitants in Eupen-Malmédy and in the Rhineland. He would then expose them to Baltia's officials, who could choose either to monitor their movements, intimidate them, or arrest and charge them as the occasion demanded.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵Doepgen, *Die Abtretung*, 155–179.

¹¹⁶AA, R764.19, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmédy, L006015–L006017, Die belgische Terror in Eupen [Report], 6 May 1920.

¹¹⁷AA, R76.425, Akten betreffend die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmédy (2 December 1920–1929 January 1921); Christian Sand, *Agent provocateur in Eupen-Malmédy: Erlebnisse im Dienste des belgischen Gouvernements* (Berlin: Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1921).

Rolin-Jaequemyns continued to alert the Foreign Ministry to the various forms of propaganda being practised in the Rhineland, with the aim of undermining the popular consultation. One particular advertisement encouraged residents of Eupen-Malmedy (over 3,000 of them worked in and around Aachen) to write to the American representative in the 'League of Oppressed Peoples' in Berlin.¹¹⁸ Jaequemyns thought it better not to refer the matter to the American Commissioner in the IARHC, whom he believed showed far too much deference to the Germans, and during the drawing of the new Belgian–German frontier 'had only too easily shown his distrust towards us'.¹¹⁹

The district commissioner for Malmedy, Schnorrenberg, was adamant that many of the points of contention raised by the German authorities over the execution of the popular consultation were unsustainable. On the contrary, he charged that considerable pressure was being imposed from Berlin on German state functionaries in order to get them to protest against the change of sovereignty. He claimed that a propaganda campaign of 'unprecedented intensity' had been unleashed, which aimed to 'trouble the consciences of the peaceful populations [sic] who had confided in us, and had placed themselves under our protection'.¹²⁰ Schnorrenberg cited the visit of two teachers who came to protest. Whilst letting it be known that they were German and wished to stay German, they nevertheless 'rendered homage to the benevolence of the Belgian authorities', and attempted to explain that 'their attitude' had been imposed on them by their government.¹²¹

As the deadline for the closing of the registers loomed, Sir Eric Drummond, Secretary General of the League of Nations, received a *communiqué* from a group claiming to represent the inhabitants of Eupen, Malmedy and Monschau. The *communiqué* outlined the situation being experienced in the districts, but informed Sir Eric that representatives of the group were as yet unable to travel to meet with the secretary

¹¹⁸The League of Oppressed Peoples was an anti-imperialist movement begun by the archaeologist and university professor Arthur Upham Pope in New York in the immediate post-war period.

¹¹⁹AAEB, 10.792/III/5952/10, Eupen-Malmedy, Rolin-Jaequemyns to Hymans, 22 May 1920.

¹²⁰AAEB, 11/443, Consultation populaire, Schnorrenberg to Baltia, 1 June 1920.

¹²¹Ibid.

general in person, as they were still awaiting their travel papers.¹²² The correspondence detailed the difficulties experienced in attempting to register their vote of protest. Threats, intimidation and obstructions were a regular occurrence, according to the memo, which also claimed that on average over 75% of those who had gone to vote had been turned away.¹²³

At a meeting of the Council of Ambassadors in Versailles in May, and following numerous representations by the German authorities, the British ambassador to France, Lord Derby, declared that while he did not see the need for any modification to Article 34 of the treaty, he nevertheless took issue with a number of operational matters concerning the consultation. In particular, he referred to a Belgian circular which he had in his possession, and which promised to inflict ‘a special treatment’ on those inhabitants who dared to sign the register. He noted how:

They are refused all kinds of favours, they are presented with difficulties when changing marks and in the provision of basic necessities which their fellow inhabitants receive, they are refused passports and exportation permits.¹²⁴

Lord Derby, however, doubted that such a practice was official Belgian policy, and he was assured by Belgium’s envoy to France, Baron de Gaiffier d’Hestroy, that perhaps one district commissioner had dictated a circular which ‘constituted manifestly an excess of zeal’. According to Baron d’Hestroy, Governor Baltia had immediately annulled the directions given by his subordinate once he had become aware of them.¹²⁵ In Brussels, Hymans conceded that the Germans had just cause to complain

¹²²The National Archives (TNA), Belgium, FO/371/3644B/294–307, Memorandum from delegation of inhabitants of Eupen, Malmédy and Monschau protesting against the intimidation to which the Belgian authorities subjected the German inhabitants with a view to preventing their voting, 10 September 1920.

¹²³AA, R76.417Akten über Die Abstimmung in Eupen Malmédy, Bd.4, Graf Mutaschka to Übergabekommission, 23 March 1920.

¹²⁴TNA, FO 371/3644B/306, Belgium, Circular from L. De Smeets to the Mayors of Eupen and Malmédy.

¹²⁵AAEB, 10.792/I/7, Eupen-Malmédy, 10 Conseils des Ambassadeurs, Séance du 29 Mai 1920–Affaire d’Eupen-Malmédy; AAEB, Eupen-Malmédy, 10.792/II, Réponse du gouvernement belge à la note allemande du 31 Mars 1920 relative à la consultation populaire [no date].

about the appearance of the '*circulaire générale*', the text of which threatened to withdraw favours from anybody who decided to sign the register. He was, however, convinced that the work was that of 'an overzealous functionary', and since the terms were not executed, the issue was redundant.¹²⁶ However, as we have seen, this was certainly not the case. Within two days of the Belgian delegation's letter to the Secretary General of the Peace Conference, Baltia's *chef du cabinet* wrote to the two district commissioners Xhaffaire and Schnorrenberg referring to the speech made by Paul Hymans to the Belgian parliament, in which he stated that measures such as the refusal of foodstuffs, as well as a prohibition on the exchange of marks, were to cease. The *communiqué* ended by stating that 'all that remains now is the denial of the favour of the trilingual stamp [*cachet trilingue*]',¹²⁷

Whether written or verbal, such threats were very much the order of the day throughout the districts. The German government produced a 'white book' in which over seventy-three testaments, allegedly from inhabitants of the territory, were compiled attesting to the unethical nature of the popular consultation. Most of the entries were anonymous and therefore the submission was deemed to carry no weight by the League Council.¹²⁸ Although the anonymous nature of the entries may have seemed rather suspicious, it was also understandable that nobody wished to be identified, fearing that such information could eventually fall into Belgian hands.

But threats of expulsion and the withdrawal of certain basic necessities were not the only options open to Baltia in influencing the outcome of the consultation. Apart from coercion, a softer approach might prove just as beneficial in winning over an apprehensive population. Baltia was aware that many of the inhabitants had been impressed by the dignity shown by Belgium's king throughout the war. When King Albert visited the camp at Elsenborn in May 1920, he used the opportunity to

¹²⁶AAEB, 10.792/II, Eupen-Malmedy, De Romrée to Secretary General of the Paris Peace Conference, 5 May 1920; 'Réponse du gouvernement belge à la note allemande du 31 March 1920 relative à la consultation populaire' [no date].

¹²⁷AAEB, 10.792/II/3565, Eupen-Malmedy, Major F. Daufresne, Chef du cabinet du Gouvernement d'Eupen-Malmedy to Commissaires de District, 7 May 1920.

¹²⁸*Livre blanc: Documents concernant la consultation populaire dans les cercles d'Eupen-Malmedy (traduction française)* (Berlin: Reichdruckerei, 1920).

decorate a number of Belgian veterans who had fought in artillery regiments and were now stationed in the border camp at Elsenborn. The king also used the occasion to decorate a number of residents of the region nominated by Baltia, who had displayed their loyalty to Belgium and to his transitory government. Among those honoured were the abbots Nicolas Pietkin and Joseph Bastin.¹²⁹

For the duration of the king's visit, both he and Baltia were chauffeured by a German army veteran, who took pride in showing his newly adopted monarch around his *Heimat*. On occasion, a crowd might gather in anticipation that the king was due to pass by. Schoolchildren lined some of the route under the careful watch of their teachers. While travelling from Eupen to Malmedy, the king requested that they stop briefly at the edge of the High Fens, a massive expanse of moorland stretching from Eupen to the Luxembourg border and across the border into Germany. There, in the vast stretch of marshland, as renowned for its rare plant life as it is for its extreme climate, the two men swapped anecdotes about the might of the elements and the apparent frailty of mankind in facing them. 'Man, as much as he may seem powerless to defeat them, must not give up, he must continue the struggle', said the king. 'The man who fights courageously against the wild elements becomes strong and apt to confront the difficulties of life.'¹³⁰ Baltia understood the significance of the king's remarks, taking encouragement from them. Like the High Fens which lay between the two former Prussian *Kreise*, many centuries of history had accumulated between them and their new *patrie*, Belgium.

Once success in the popular consultation had been assured, Baltia's mission would be to build the foundations for a new future for the two districts inside Belgium. However, he could not ignore the sediment of history and memory that had accumulated over centuries of conflict and conquest. The king would return to the camp at Elsenborn on two other occasions, on 15 June 1921 and 27 June 1922, to oversee military manoeuvres.¹³¹ It would not be until 1938 that his son and heir, King Leopold III, would again visit the region. Such a hiatus in terms of royal

¹²⁹Herman Baltia, *Le Roi Albert* (Brussels: Éditions L'Avenir, 1938), 73–75.

¹³⁰Baltia, *Le Roi Albert*, 85.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 73–74.

interest is rather striking when one considers the turbulent period that followed the termination of Baltia's regime in 1925.

Another boost to Baltia's propaganda programme was the visit in July of French Prime Minister Alexandre Millerand. The former war minister had previously been general commissioner of Alsace-Lorraine. Millerand was enthusiastically welcomed by Baltia, who saw his visit as a 'significant mark of support' for his efforts. The French prime minister (soon to be president of France) offered Baltia some advice on organizational matters as the two men compared their experiences of the war and their post-war travails. The French delegation was warmly welcomed by the people of Malmedy, and a throng of schoolchildren led by their teachers jubilantly clapped and cheered as the *Marseillaise* rang out in the centre of the town. Millerand insisted, however, that the *Brabançonne* be played first. From a French perspective, the ceding of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium was as important in terms of French defensive strategy as it was to its diminutive neighbour's security and prestige.¹³² The following day was to have been the date on which the register for the popular consultation closed. However, a further extension was granted to make up for the initial delay caused by the slow departure of the *Landräte*.¹³³

When the registers finally closed on 23 July, only 271 names out of an eligible total of more than 33,000 inhabitants appeared on the register. The result was later endorsed by the League of Nations on 20 September 1920, and the sovereign status of the territory resolved, or so it appeared in the eyes of the international community. The following day, the Belgian tricolour flew on all state buildings across the kingdom and in Eupen-Malmedy.¹³⁴ In the Belgian parliament, the government's proclamation began the official process of writing the new national narrative. A kingdom already on the brink of implosion between the rival demands of its Flemish and Walloon subjects now attempted to embrace a new ethnic entity, along with the 'Prussian Walloons' who made up the rest of the population of *new Belgium*. The government's proclamation stuck rigidly to the myth of a Belgian nation once again restored by stating that 'after a separation of more than a century, the two districts have

¹³²Rapport sur l'activité, i, 21.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴TNA, FO/371/5456, Incorporation of Eupen-Malmedy into Kingdom of Belgium, Sir George Grahame to Earl Curzon of Kedleston, 21 September 1920.

come back to the *mère patrie*'. Belgium could now be doubly satisfied, not only having come out of the war on the winning side, but having also liberated 'the national soil of her children who freely came back to her'.¹³⁵ On the face of it, the outcome was also a resounding victory for Baltia and his government.¹³⁶ However, the extent to which that fateful day impacted on the people directly affected by it was secondary to the more important concern of making Germany pay. Not for the last time, the people of Eupen-Malmedy would learn that the exigencies of the Belgian state trumped their basic rights.¹³⁷

GERMAN REACTION TO BELGIUM'S DEFINITIVE ANNEXATION OF EUPEN-MALMEDY

In spite of his success, Baltia remained eager to stamp his authority on subversive elements in the region. He wrote to Delacroix in September 1920, seeking permission to decree the removal of certain individuals from the territory who had been identified as having indulged in anti-Belgian activity, and to have them resettled in old Belgium. His intention was to prevent them from returning to the Eastern Cantons indefinitely. Delacroix dismissed this request as not in keeping with Belgian law.¹³⁸ If the Belgian government seemed less concerned about the threat posed by German dissidents following the League of Nations' decision, it was nevertheless at the same time eager to appear more accommodating towards its new citizens.

Whatever Rolin-Jaequemyns may have thought about German apathy over Eupen-Malmedy, this was not borne out by the palpable sense of outrage in the German press in the days following the League of Nations' decision. The Germans persisted with demands for a new

¹³⁵AAEB, 10.792/III/10, Eupen-Malmedy, *Moniteur Belge*, 20 & 22 September 1920.

¹³⁶Baltia was awarded the title of Baron by royal decree on 28 August 1920. Gouvernement d'Eupen Malmedy, *Eupen-Malmedy et son gouverneur: Mémorial publié à l'occasion de la Manifestation organisée en l'honneur du Lieutenant-Général Baron Baltia* (Bruxelles: L'Imprimerie J.E. Goossens, 1923).

¹³⁷Freddy Cremer, 'Verschlussache Geschichte: Über den Umgang mit der eigenen Vergangenheit' in Carlo Lejeune, Andreas Fickers & Freddy Cremer, *Spuren in die Zukunft: Anmerkungen zu einem bewegten Jahrhundert* (Büllingen: Lexis, 2001), 19–21.

¹³⁸AAEB, 10.792/III/5896, Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia to Delacroix, 9 September 1920; 10.792/III/10373Delacroix to Baltia, 24 September 1920.

'referendum'. In an article in the *Hamburgischer Korrespondent*, reference was made to comments by a certain T. Singleton from the British Union of Democratic Control (UDC) in London, citing the public expression of opinion as 'a scandal and a stain on Belgian honour'.¹³⁹ The German government continued to refuse to accept the decision of the Supreme Council of the League of Nations on the status of Eupen-Malmedy. The Secretary General of the League, Sir Eric Drummond, wrote to the German foreign minister in October 1920 outlining the reasons why the decision taken by the Supreme Council was a valid one. Germany argued that the decision was invalid because it had not been decided by the Assembly of the League but by the Supreme Council, a development which, according to the German government, was at odds with the Covenant of the League. Germany's argument hinged on the fact that the Treaty of Versailles made specific references to the competence of the Council of the League in certain areas. Drummond wished to clear up any misunderstanding in this regard, stating that, according to paragraph 4 of Article 4 of the League Covenant, '[t]he Council may deal at its meetings with any matter within the sphere of action of the League', and that therefore the council did have competence to make a decision on the future of Eupen-Malmedy.¹⁴⁰ Germany was also critical of the fact that the USA was not represented on the council.¹⁴¹

The visit of the German Chancellor Constantin Ferhenbach and Foreign Minister von Simons to the Rhineland in November of 1920 also raised suspicions in Brussels of more trouble to come. Greeted enthusiastically by the *Bürgermeister* of Düsseldorf, Germany's two leading politicians assured their audience that the 'Rhineland is indivisible and it must stay German'.¹⁴² Their visit coincided with a heightening of tensions in the Rhineland over German intransigence on the reparations issue. Von Simons warned however, that if the Ruhr came to be occupied by allied troops, Germany 'would be absolutely within its rights

¹³⁹ *Hamburgischer Korrespondent*, 24 September 1920; AAEB, 10.792/III/738, Eupen-Malmedy, Albert Moulaert to Delacroix, 5 October 1920.

¹⁴⁰ AA, R76.417, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd.4, Dr Simons to Sir Eric Drummond, 2 October 1920; Sir Eric Drummond to Dr Simons, 22 October 1920.

¹⁴¹ *Echo der Gegenwart*, 18 November 1920.

¹⁴² AAEB, 10.792/III, 7771/2928, Eupen-Malmedy, Comte della Faille to Delacroix, 16 November 1920; The two men also visited Cologne and Aachen. Paul Tirard, *La France sur le Rhin: douze années d'occupation rhénane* (Paris: Plon, 1930), 36–38.

to consider such an eventuality an act of hostility'. In any event, he did not foresee such an occurrence, as no less than Lloyd George himself had observed that Germany had faced up to her obligations. That said, he pointed out that in the unlikely event that the Ruhr came to be occupied, this would be interpreted as contravening the treaty and Germany would no longer be obliged to abide by it.¹⁴³ Paris reacted to the speech by instructing its ambassador in Berlin to cooperate with allied representatives, and to lodge a complaint against the comments made by both the German chancellor and the foreign minister. He was furthermore instructed to make clear in no uncertain terms that if such a visit were repeated, arrests would be made.¹⁴⁴

The German foreign minister had earlier delivered a less antagonistic speech concerning the allied occupation of the Rhineland to the Reichstag at the end of October—a speech which culminated in the phrase '[i]t is by relying on the ideas of law that Germany will achieve a more durable peace than that which it would be assured of through arms'.¹⁴⁵ Dr von Simons was critical of what he saw as the dissatisfaction displayed by the inhabitants of the occupied Rhineland zone, and of the heavy military presence of 145,000 allied soldiers on the ground there. Although von Simons railed against the decision of the Supreme Council of the League of Nations on the status of Eupen and Malmedy, he was at pains to point out that any future solution should be based on 'the mutual cooperation of peoples'. 'One day', he added, 'it will no longer be a question of occupied territories and non-occupied territories, but one where the people of Europe will collaborate on the basis of understanding and harmony.'¹⁴⁶ But, he continued, '[w]e can never and will

¹⁴³AAEB, 10.792/III, 7771/2928, Eupen-Malmedy, Comte della Faille to Delacroix, 16 November 1920; APR-KPR, 536, Procès verbal, Conseil de cabinet, Séance, 27 November 1920.

¹⁴⁴AAEB, 10.792/III/262, Eupen-Malmedy, De Gaiffier to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Telegram, [no date].

¹⁴⁵AAEB, 10.792/III/7879/2965, Eupen-Malmedy, Dr Simons to the Reichstag, 29 October 1920, cited in correspondence from Comte della Faille to Delacroix, 19 November 1920; AAEB, 10/792/III/7597/2855, Eupen-Malmedy, Riewdenschuys to Delacroix, 5 November 1920.

¹⁴⁶AAEB, 10.792/III/7879/2965, Eupen-Malmedy, Comte della Faille to Delacroix, 19 November 1920.

never accept as legal the methods by which the districts of Eupen and Malmedy have been separated from the corpus of the empire'.¹⁴⁷

In his correspondence to the secretary general of the League of Nations, von Simons accused the Belgian government of intimidation and demanded a more liberal milieu in which the people of the cantons could freely express their will. In doing so, he cited the League's resolution, stating that it could be modified if sufficient proof were provided that the results of the 'plebiscite' had been achieved through intimidation or undue pressure.¹⁴⁸ Yet if German demands for some kind of revision of the events of the previous months had fallen on deaf ears, to those watching events from afar, not least in Britain and the United States, a considerable degree of sympathy towards Germany was increasingly evident. The danger of such sentiment snowballing into something more concrete worried the Belgian authorities. There was also some concern within Belgian government circles that their propaganda or 'counterpropaganda' was not nearly as effective as that of the Germans. Belgian responses to German accusations published in the press were seen as too 'administrative', and lacking the incisiveness and efficacy associated with the latter.¹⁴⁹ In December, Baltia felt it necessary to place a notice in the local press, to 'put the population on guard against the tendentious news being put out by the superior authorities of the Reich concerning the definitive status of these regions'.¹⁵⁰ Such public pronouncements from either side proved to be the beginning of a much longer debate over the future status of Eupen-Malmedy. For Germany, what seemed most important was the precedent that would be set by undermining Belgium's sovereign right over the districts. In this way, the less than transparent nature of the public expression of opinion played into German hands. Thus, even at this early stage the newly attached portion of territory seemed rather precariously secured to its new *patrie*.

¹⁴⁷ *Echo der Gegenwart*, 18 November 1920.

¹⁴⁸ AA, R76.425, Die Abstimmung in Eupen-Malmedy, Bd. 9–10, Dr Simons, German Foreign Minister to Secretary General of the League of Nations, 30 November 1920 [translation].

¹⁴⁹ AAEB, 10.792/III, Eupen-Malmedy, 1919–1922, Note pour Monsieur le Ministre sur Propagande dans la question d'Eupen et de Malmédy, Maury to Jaspas, 20 December 1920.

¹⁵⁰ *La Semaine*, 11 December 1920.

One recalls the analogy made by Nicolas Pietkin, the abbot of Sourbrodt, a village on the outskirts of Malmédy, when comparing the coercive nature of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* with the actions of Damastes, the Greek mythological character who enticed his victims to spend the night in a bed which he had prepared for them. If they proved too long for the bed, he would proceed to cut off their limbs. If too short, he would stretch them until they fitted the contours of his fatal lure.¹⁵¹ The dubious means by which the public expression of opinion had been executed was another instance whereby people were forced to fit the contours of a historical narrative, written with the ink of present-day exigencies, their past dismembered and distorted.

The popular consultation was more than just a milestone on Eupen-Malmédy's troubled historical path. Due to the dubious nature of its execution, the consultation later became the touchstone for much inflamed rhetoric, and claims by Germany from Stresemann to Hitler for a revision of the Versailles Treaty, and the holding of a new consultation. The low level of participation in the consultation was not due solely to fear of intimidation from the Belgian authorities, although this certainly played a part. The dilemma for many caught in the vortex of post-war turmoil was the degree to which the burden of reparations would be weighed against Germany, not just in terms of ensuring access to life's basic necessities, but also in terms of how the country was to be governed. The result was that many individuals decided to keep their options open by not partaking in the exercise, even though by not protesting one was deemed to have supported the annexation by Belgium.

The desire for a fairer and more stable form of government inclined many to declare for Belgium, or at least decline from protesting against the annexation. Many more were fearful of protesting under the eyes of the Belgian authorities. The fact that the public expression of opinion was not conducted in secret and that one could only participate by protesting against the annexation meant that people preferred to avoid the ire of the authorities, and the ensuing consequences. Whether the low turnout in the consultation was purely an act of passive resistance, to borrow a term associated with the tumultuous events in the Ruhr a couple of years later, is a moot point. Alternatively, the interpretation of the

¹⁵¹Joseph Bastin, L'abbé Nicolas Pietkin, à sa mémoire et à celle des défenseurs de la tradition latine en Wallonie malmédienne, *La Terre Wallonne*, 21 (Charleroi: La Terre Wallonne, 1921), 152–153.

outcome by Rolin-Jaequemyns as a 'lukewarm and apathetic' reaction to the future status of the territory may also carry some weight. However, the environment in which the public expression of opinion took place was one clouded more by fear and disillusionment than by apathy.

On a wider scale, the contradictions thrown up by the popular consultation were not as immediately obvious as they would later become during the interwar period. The carrot and stick approach adopted by Baltia to coax the populace towards Belgium seemed, in the short term at least, to have achieved its objective. However, the draconian and heavy-handed tactics used during the course of the early stages of his tenure did much to undermine the legitimacy of the entire regime. It would soon transpire that, unlike Damastes' victims, the pro-German inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy would not remain passive recipients of Belgian hospitality.

‘Making Good Belgians’: Political Incorporation and National Assimilation 1920–1925

From the moment he took office as Royal High Commissioner of Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia anticipated a ‘very slow transformation’ of the existing political structure, and an even more protracted evolution in terms of mindsets. Any thoughts of a more ‘radical’ approach were, he contended at the time, sure ‘to lead to great upheaval’.¹ Baltia believed that ‘the mentality of a population [was] not transformed by laws, but by providing it with a new ideal’.² In terms of the ‘redeemed cantons’, this ideal was the promise that these political foundlings would be nurtured by a caring *mère patrie* in whose ‘bosom’ they would find protection. This interpretation promised Belgium’s ‘rediscovered brothers’ a free and open society, as indicated in the proclamation of 11 January.³ Baltia aimed to instil in the populace a sense of what it meant to be Belgian, which to him necessitated an expressed loyalty to the king and to the constitution. Following the League of Nations’ endorsement of the results of the popular consultation, Eupen-Malmedy’s political integration began in earnest.

¹Staatsarchiv Eupen (SAE), Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III.192, *Haut-Commissariat Royal d’Eupen Malmedy, Rapport sur l’activité générale du Gouvernement d’Eupen et de Malmedy, II, Septembre 1919–Juli 1920* (hereafter, *Rapport sur l’activité*, ii), 167.

²SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III.191, *Haut Commissariat Royal d’Eupen Malmedy, Rapport sur l’activité générale du Gouvernement d’Eupen et de Malmedy, i, Septembre 1919–Juli 1920* (hereafter, *Rapport sur l’activité*, i), 99.

³RCW, E.323/50.30.11/RP, *Proclamation, Recueil*, i, 1–4.

Baltia had the benefit of looking to the situation in Alsace-Lorraine and how the French authorities there had begun to realize its integration within the French state. While some parallels existed between what was unfolding in Alsace-Lorraine and Eupen-Malmedy, the two scenarios were not identical. In the first instance, the 'lost provinces' of Alsace and Lorraine had belonged to France since the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV respectively. As for Eupen-Malmedy, the two districts had never formed part of the modern Belgian state. Furthermore, Alsace and Lorraine were returned to France unconditionally, and therefore there was no requirement for a plebiscite. Although Alsace was largely German-speaking, the vast majority of its population demonstrated a clear preference for French citizenship. Be that as it may, in his memoirs Baltia referred to a work published in 1929 by the French literary critic and journalist René Gillouin in which the main grievances of the inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine were anatomized under three specific headings: temporal, spiritual and cultural.⁴ As evinced from Baltia's official reports which he compiled up to 1922, this triad was equally applicable to the assimilationist project in Eupen-Malmedy. What follows takes its cue from Baltia's dissection of his tenure, by focusing in the main on the three key areas identified by him as essential to the assimilationist project: education, local government and reform of the clergy.

The realm of education was an important milieu in which future generations of new Belgians would have to be inculcated with the values and ideals of the Belgian state. However, a significant body of pro-German teachers posed a formidable threat to this process. How Baltia dealt with these pro-German pedagogues would greatly impact the success of his mission. Language was something that traversed the border between the temporal and the cultural, and the question concerning the primacy of one language over another would have to be dealt with most effectively and urgently within the context of the school system. Beyond the schoolroom, the nexus of local government that prevailed in Eupen-Malmedy would have to be transformed from a German to a Belgian model. Baltia deemed the reform of local government as the most important component of the integration process. However,

⁴Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen (LANRW), Nachlass Baltia, Erinnerungen, 'Comparaison de la situation à Eupen-Malmedy et en Alsace-Lorraine' 00078; Els Herrebout, *Generalleutnant Herman Baltia: Memoiren 1920-1925* (hereafter, *Memoiren*) (Eupen: Archives Générales du Royaume, 2012), 87.

the difficulties encountered during that phase of integration paled into insignificance when compared with his attempts to assert control over the local clergy. This most formidable obstacle to what Jacques Thier, at the Belgian Foreign Ministry, would later describe as the process of 'Belgification' (Baltia uses the term 'Belgicization') had to be overcome if the hearts and minds of the population were to be won over to Belgium.⁵ While the role of the clergy may be considered part of the spiritual pillar of the assimilatory process, a more potent nationalist spirit stirred the sentiments of most clergy and many among their congregation who worried about what the future would bring.

Assimilation meant confronting issues pertaining not only to the region's future, but to its past also. The war was over, but the memory of that conflict remained fresh in the minds of the territory's inhabitants. Their contribution to the war as soldiers of the *Kaiserreich* was something that would have to be dealt with within the contours of the assimilation. In tandem with this highly sensitive aspect of the integration was a commitment by Baltia's government to preserve and protect the cultural heritage of the area. In this way, Baltia's regime attempted to mollify mentalities by creating cultural liens that would tie these new Belgians to the *mère patrie*. The extent to which Baltia's actions would live up to the pronouncements made in the proclamation of January 1920 would define the success or otherwise of his tenure.

From the earliest days of his regime, Baltia faced criticism from a growing chorus of critics, whether local, national or international, demanding the abolition of the transitory regime whilst decrying its dictatorial character. In time, the provisional government's abolition would bring its own challenges, not least in terms of how the full political incorporation of the districts would play out. The question of whether or not Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith should form a separate electoral entity within the Belgian state or be incorporated into one or more of Belgium's existing provinces was the first post-Baltia issue that needed to be addressed. Whatever the final decision, Baltia had insisted from the outset that political incorporation was one thing, but that full

⁵AAEB, 10.792/1/207, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Thier, 13 January 1931; SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III.193, *Haut-Commissariat Royal d'Eupen Malmedy, Rapport sur l'activité générale du Gouvernement d'Eupen et de Malmedy, iii, September 1921–July 1922* (hereafter, Rapport sur l'activité, iii), 52.

assimilation would need a much longer incubation period—something which was already evident in Alsace-Lorraine.

‘OUR ALSACE-LORRAINE’

Eupen-Malmedy’s annexation by Belgium was just one of several instances of territorial amputation experienced by Germany after the war. In total, Germany lost as much as 10% of its pre-war territory under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, including the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. While Lorraine was a predominantly francophone province, only a tiny minority of the population of Alsace spoke French. Many of those employed in civic administration and in teaching found their future careers now under threat due to a lack of proficiency in French. In Eupen-Malmedy, where no more than 10,000 out of a population of around 65,000 spoke French (of whom only 4,000 spoke only French) a similar apprehension gripped the German-speaking population.⁶ In 1910, the Belgian weekly juridical publication *Journal des Tribunaux* described Prussian Wallonia as ‘our Alsace-Lorraine’ and noted how, like the former citizens of the French Republic, ‘our brothers of race and language were exiled and imprisoned in Prussia’.⁷ Once the Treaty of Versailles had been signed in June 1919, the way was set for these *frères retrouvés* to be freed finally from the yoke of Prussian oppression. The authorities in Brussels now focused on how best to administer Eupen-Malmedy, at least until the promised popular consultation had been completed. Shortly after the Versailles Treaty had been signed, Belgium’s Foreign Minister Paul Hymans insisted that any regime change in Eupen-Malmedy would have to take place ‘in a spirit of conciliation, whilst not excluding the necessary firmness needed in dealing with essential issues [...] the wishes of the population being heard in as much as possible’.⁸

Looking to Alsace and Lorraine as a precedent, the Belgian government assigned Camille Jacquart to Strasbourg to study how the

⁶Klaus Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 218.

⁷Carlo Lejeune, ‘Des Deutschtums fernster Westen’ in Burkhard Dietz, Helmut Gabel, Ulrich Tiedau (eds.), *Griff nach dem Westen* (Münster, New York, München & Berlin: Waxmann, 2003), 495; Philippe Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland: Selbst und Fremdbilder bei Josef Ponten und Peter Schmitz (1918–1940)* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2013), 80.

⁸AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Hymans to Delvaux de Fenffe, 10 July 1919.

French were applying themselves to the task of reincorporating 'the lost provinces' into the Third Republic.⁹ Having relinquished Alsace and most of Lorraine to Germany following defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, a now victorious and vengeful France proceeded to reassert its influence. Following their annexation by Germany, these territories became romanticized in the French national consciousness as 'twin sisters' who had been taken from the *mère patrie* and longed to be reunited with their mother.¹⁰ As we have seen previously, a similar rhetoric to that surrounding the fate of Alsace-Lorraine surfaced during the peace negotiations in Paris to justify Belgium's claim to Eupen-Malmedy.¹¹ The French situation greatly influenced the approach taken by Belgium, at least initially, as an excerpt from the bill dealing with the imminent takeover demonstrates:

[T]he Government, inspired by French *décrets* concerning Alsace and Lorraine proposes to confer extended powers on a Royal High Commissioner, which will allow him to accomplish his important and

⁹Having graduated as a lawyer, Jacquart worked as a journalist with the *Courrier de Bruxelles* newspaper before becoming editor of the journal *XXè siècle*. His career saw him take a temporary position as a statistician in the Interior Ministry, but eventually he ascended through the ranks to the post of first secretary by the end of 1898. In November 1918, Jacquart was transferred from the Interior Ministry and took on the role of technical advisor to the Grand Quartier Général (GQG) de l'armée (Headquarters of the Belgian military), with responsibility for overseeing German administration in Belgian-occupied Germany. He sat on a number of commissions in the aftermath of the war, such as the *Commission interministérielle d'adaptation des Cantons d'Eupen-Malmedy et St. Vith*. In 1929, Jacquart was appointed General Secretary of the Belgian Interior Ministry, a post he held until his death in 1931. Alphonse Dufasne, 'Camille Jacquart', in *Biographie Nationale*, t. 39 (supplément t. xi) (Bruxelles: L'Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique: Émile Bruylant, 1976), 471–478; AAEB, 10.792/I/3352, Eupen-Malmedy, Belgian Interior Minister de Broqueville to Paul Hymans, 10 July 1919.

¹⁰Thomas Willing Balch, *The Question of Alsace and Lorraine* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1918), 78.

¹¹Unlike Eupen-Malmedy, the 'lost provinces' of Alsace and Lorraine also contained some 74,000 Protestants, accounting for over a quarter of the population. The Protestant population in Eupen-Malmedy, on the other hand, was relatively miniscule. Laird Boswell, 'From liberation to purge trials in the 'mythic provinces': recasting French identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918–1920', *French Historical Studies*, 23 (1) (Winter 2000) 129–162 (131).

delicate mission; the gradual adaptation of the *cercles* of Eupen and Malmedy to Belgian national life until a complete assimilation is realized.¹²

In Alsace, as German legislation was more favourable to the inhabitants than French legislation, no immediate alterations took place.¹³ Be that as it may, in all branches of the local administration, functionaries of German origin were replaced by those from France. Nevertheless, the administration operated in both languages, and at the lower levels of administration it was accepted that day-to-day operations be carried out in German alone. A decree of the 5 June 1917 had already placed the territory under the direct responsibility of the minister for war. Another decree on 15 November 1918 ensured that, throughout the period of the armistice until the signing of the Versailles Treaty, the civil administration in the region would be supported by three commissioners of the French Republic who would each have responsibility over specific *départements* into which the territory was divided—Lorraine, Basse-Alsace and Haute-Alsace. These commissioners were answerable to the minister for war. The commissioner for Basse-Alsace was responsible for the administration of services between all three *départements*. The fact that the region was in essence governed from Paris, where all key decisions were made, meant that there was little contact with people on the ground. Jules Jeanneney had been appointed by the *président du conseil*, Georges Clemenceau, to oversee the operation from Paris.

However, by the spring of 1919 things began to change. The troika of commissars was replaced by a single *commissaire général* based in Strasbourg who, although still answerable to the minister for war, was given extensive powers to carry out his mission. The French government appointed the former Minister for War Alexandre Millerand as high commissioner of Alsace-Lorraine on 21 March 1919.¹⁴ As high commissioner, Millerand had a seat on the council of ministers representing the provinces over which he now ruled. He also participated in a consultative

¹²AAEB, 10/792/1, Eupen-Malmedy, Projet de loi concernant le gouvernement des territoires réunis à la Belgique en vertu du Traité de Versailles, Paul Hymans to Pierre Van Werveke, 28 June 1919.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴*The New York Times*, 22 March 1919; The post was originally offered to the former French Governor General of Algeria, Charles C.A. Jonnart, but he refused it.

body called the *Conseil Supérieur d'Alsace-Lorraine* (the former diet of Alsace-Lorraine having been disbanded).¹⁵

Jacquart provided the Belgian government with a general outline of how the *commissaire général's* regime dealt with the various areas of administration from law to taxation, education, railways, forestry and social insurance. According to Jacquart, during the initial phase of Millerand's tenure the least possible change was to take place, 'so as not to offend local practices, causing unnecessary damage to legitimate interests'. Jacquart's advice to the Belgian government was to emulate the French model, but to tread carefully.¹⁶

Following his appointment as Royal High Commissioner for Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia kept abreast of developments in Alsace and Lorraine and familiarized himself with a number of texts by the Alsatian priest and independent member of the *Reichstag*, Émile Wetterlé. Wetterlé reported regularly on the changing situation in the territory.¹⁷ One of Wetterlé's articles, which Baltia cites in his first report to the Belgian prime minister in 1920, advised that instead of employing French functionaries with little or no knowledge of the immediate area, the French government ought to have established a local network in Alsace and Lorraine. This, he asserted, should comprise individuals with a sound

¹⁵Joseph Schmauch, 'De l'armistice à la mise en place du commissariat général: Les premiers pas de l'administration française en Alsace-Lorraine recouvré (November 1918–March 1919), La direction générale du travail, de la législation ouvrière et des assurances sociales au commissariat général, *Colloque: Les Cahiers du Comité d'Histoire*, 11 December 2009, Cahier no. 12 (April 2010) (Paris: Ministère du Travail, de la Solidarité et de la Fonction Publique), 17–24 (17–18).

¹⁶AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Camille Jacquart, Rapport à Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur sur l'Application de la Législation et des Institutions Françaises dans les Provinces Reconquises, 19 September 1920.

¹⁷Émile Wetterlé, originally from Alsace was a priest, journalist and politician who represented Alsace as an autonomist member of the Reichstag for sixteen years. He would later serve in the *Chambre des députés* from 1919 to 1924 as a member of the *Entente républicaine démocratique*. He wrote extensively on the situation in Alsace Lorraine following its retrocession to France after the war. Two of his major works were *L'Alsace-Lorraine doit rester française* (Paris: Delagrave, 1917) and *Ce qu'était l'Alsace-Lorraine et ce qu'elle sera* (Paris: L'Édition Française Illustrée, 1916). He took part in the Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine in 1915, which aimed at French control of Alsace during the war and the reincorporation of 'the lost provinces' after the war.

knowledge of the area, its culture and its politics.¹⁸ Wetterlé was highly critical of what he described as ‘the defective system’ of administration where a series of ‘badly defined objectives by half-civil/half-military functionaries chosen by chance’ was made worse by ‘a high commissioner [who] was unable to take any decisions without referring to the [French] cabinet’. This, in his opinion, had led to a state of confusion in Alsace and Lorraine. This was something which Baltia believed could be avoided in Eupen-Malmedy by making good use of the extensive powers with which he had been entrusted. However, Wetterlé’s writings were rabidly anti-German, and he was unconcerned with the expulsion by the French of some 50,000 German civilians whose families had lived in Alsace-Lorraine for centuries. On the contrary, Wetterlé asked why this number had not been exceeded to bring the ‘*épuration*’—in essence, ethnic cleansing—to a more acceptable level.¹⁹ Against the backdrop of the *épuration*, many Germans and a number of Alsatians fled the territory as the *commissions de triage* (sorting commissions), which had been established to identify and to extirpate pro-German elements among the population, rolled into action. In this way, they were merely repeating the errors committed by the German authorities in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War.

Alongside the difficulties posed by the spread of German culture and the application of German laws following almost 50 years of rule from Berlin, the French had another obstacle with which to contend. During the First World War, the government advocated Alsatian regionalism as a way of undermining Germany’s authority in the region. Now, in the wake of the war, French integrationist methods had to contend with that same Alsatian regionalism.²⁰ But the two biggest challenges to French assimilation were in the area of education and in state–church relations.

¹⁸Émile Wetterlé, *L’Alsace et la Lorraine au lendemain de la délivrance*, *Revue des Deux Mondes* (September 1919), 855–869; Schmauch, ‘De l’armistice à la mise en place du commissariat général’, 17–24; Léon Julliot de la Morandière, ‘The legal system of Alsace-Lorraine’, *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, 29 (1) (1927), 100–110.

¹⁹Wetterlé, *L’Alsace et la Lorraine au lendemain de la délivrance*, 855–869.

²⁰Christopher J. Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians? Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870–1939* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 131.

The introduction of compulsory, free and secular primary education in France resulting from the Ferry Laws of the 1880s transformed the French education system, divesting it of clerical influence and designating French as the one and only national language of the French Republic. By the turn of the twentieth century, religious orders were prohibited from teaching in primary schools, whether public or private. However, in Alsace and Lorraine this prohibition would not be enforced as it was deemed too controversial a measure at that juncture, and might have the effect of alienating large swathes of the population.²¹ In contrast to the zealotry displayed in integrating the lost provinces, Millerand was not averse to retaining some German legislation in the provinces. He furthermore was of the opinion that Alsace in particular could qualify for some kind of special status, and that the region might become a basis for a more decentralized form of government for the rest of the country.²² In a speech delivered in Metz in September 1920, Millerand promised that:

The values, customs, and traditions which you treasure so much – and which France, when setting foot on Alsatian land in 1914 solemnly promised by the mouth of its representatives to respect – should not only be undisturbed, but should flourish.²³

Millerand's tenure as *commissaire général* came to a rather sudden end in the spring of 1920 as he left Alsace and Lorraine behind to succeed Georges Clemenceau as the *président du conseil*. In September of that same year, he succeeded Paul Deschanel as president of France. His successor as high commissioner of Alsace-Lorraine was Gabriel Alapetite. Unlike Millerand and indeed Baltia, Alapetite was a career diplomat in the vein of Delvaux de Fenffe in Belgium, and although he shared Millerand's preference for a gradual transition to French sovereignty, his authority continued to erode, up to the eventual termination of his position in 1925.²⁴

²¹Stephen L. Harp, *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850–1940* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 184.

²²Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?* 134.

²³Cited in Harp, *Learning To Be Loyal*, 183; see also Geneviève Baas, *Le malaise alsacien, 1919–1924* (Strasbourg: Développement et Communauté, 1972).

²⁴Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?* 134.

When Baltia paid a visit to Alsace in 1922, he met with Alapetite in Strasbourg. It was immediately obvious to him at that point that Alapetite exercised much less autonomy than had Millerand. His autonomy had been greatly diluted by the *Assemblée Nationale* to the extent that all his decrees had to receive the approval of the French parliament. Baltia described this development as a 'harmful measure that [he] would certainly not have accepted from the Belgian government'. Alongside the process of *épuration*, the French authorities continued to enact a policy of aggressive assimilation, particularly in the area of language. During a meeting with the director of education for Alsace-Lorraine, it was made clear to Baltia how, now that the Alsatians had become French, 'they must know only French in the school, in the barracks and in the church'.²⁵ The French authorities initially aimed to replace all those teachers who could not speak French with teachers from inside France. However, barely half of the expected 2,950 teachers from France had actually materialized by 1921. This development made attempts to prohibit religious orders from teaching in schools in the region redundant.²⁶ With the territory's return to France, a more centralized form of government replaced the limited autonomous model.

Baltia was critical of the exclusive and divisive approach adopted by the French towards the inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine. He empathized with the public displays of discontent against French methods that he personally witnessed during his visit to Strasbourg. What was already being described as a '*malaise alsacien*' was something Baltia wished to avoid being ascribed to Eupen-Malmedy. However, this would depend on how well he and his administration delivered on the promises promulgated in the proclamation of January 1920. Not surprisingly, two key areas that concerned Baltia from the outset were those of education and language.

LEARNING TO BE BELGIAN: 'BELGICIZATION' IN THE SCHOOLROOM

As was the case in Alsace-Lorraine, the realm of education in Eupen-Malmedy was rife with incident. This was in spite of—or perhaps because of—Baltia's appreciation of the seminal role that education played in

²⁵ Baltia 'Erinnerungen', 00077–8; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 86–87.

²⁶ Sharp, *Learning to be Loyal*, 188–189.

the assimilatory process. While well versed in the art of war, Baltia was less adept in coming to terms with the pedagogical terrain of *la nouvelle Belgique*. On the field of battle, one could easily identify one's enemy. However, navigating the post-war terrain of Eupen-Malmedy would prove to be a more difficult task in that the enemy was entwined within the education nexus. Dealing with maverick propagandists scurrying across the border was one thing, but those who made up the teaching body in Eupen-Malmedy were educated and influential adversaries with powerful connections beyond the border in Germany. The schoolroom in this way became the crucible in which the struggle for national allegiance would be played out.

Baltia, together with his Director of Education Léon Mallinger, had from the outset been particularly critical of the state of the professional standards of teaching across the districts, which in Baltia's opinion left much to be desired.²⁷ During the war, a number of teaching staff from the region, along with many students, had been recruited to fight for the *Vaterland*. A look through the pages of the headmaster's journal at the *Progymnasium* in Malmedy during the war shows how schooling took second place to militaristic endeavours. Baltia cited some of the content in his first report to the Belgian prime minister. One entry in April 1915 listed the names of pupils who had left school that week to take up military training.²⁸ Many joined in the hope of an adventure that, by all accounts, would last no more than a few weeks. The carriages of wagons that passed through Malmedy en route to Belgium were often inscribed with slogans such as 'Ausflug nach Paris' (excursion to Paris) and 'Auf Wiedersehen auf dem Boulevard', unaware of the terrible dividend in store, and of the devastation in which they as 'ignorant accomplices' would share.²⁹ By 1920, a number of those teachers who had fought in the war had returned to the schoolrooms from whence they came.³⁰

The number of teaching staff employed in the four middle schools of the territory in January 1920 numbered 43. Eight of these were of Belgian extraction, while 32 hailed from Germany. Only two were of

²⁷Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 301.

²⁸Rapport sur l'activité, i, 126.

²⁹Raymond Jacob, 'Malmédiens sous les drapeaux (quatrième partie)', *Malmedy Folklore*, 59 (2001–2002), 161–237 (164); *La Semaine*, 25 November 1922.

³⁰Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 96.

local origin. In the area of primary education, the situation looked only slightly more advantageous, with 76 out of the 190-strong teaching body spread across 91 primary schools having come to the territory from Belgium. This still left 106 teachers of German descent, not including the eight locally born teachers. Five primary teaching posts also remained vacant. The total number of primary school students at the commencement of Baltia's tenure numbered 9,103. Class sizes varied greatly from anywhere between 9 and 102 students. Of the four middle schools in the territory, both the *Realgymnasium* in Eupen and the *Progymnasium* in Malmedy catered for boys.³¹ Prior to entering either of these two establishments, students would have completed four years of primary education. Girls were catered for at both the *Hildegardis Lyzeum* in Eupen, which was run by the Penitent Sisters (albeit it was largely staffed by lay teachers), and at the *École Supérieur des Filles* in Malmedy, which catered for girls who had already completed three years of primary education. They would then complete a further six years of education at the *École Supérieur*. The *Lyzeum* numbered some 384 students, while its counterpart in Malmedy had just 54 students enrolled. The *Hildegardis Lyzeum*, along with the primary school in Elsenborn, stood out for Mallinger as a well-run and exceptional school. Apart from these exceptions, the general standard of education appeared to be rather poor.³² St. Vith did not possess a secondary school, and therefore most of the eligible children attended schools in Malmedy. However, a group of local nuns established a preparatory school in St. Vith.³³ During his several visits to the school, Baltia had been warmly welcomed. However, he noted that the nuns displayed strongly pro-German sentiments and the extent to which this was the case was revealed when the head of the school was charged with falsifying the passports and identity cards of her students. When the authorities came to arrest the school head at the convent, she had already fled to Germany.³⁴ Such incidents highlighted the challenges

³¹ Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 299.

³² Gouvernement d'Eupen Malmedy, *Eupen-Malmedy et son gouverneur: Mémorial publié à l'occasion de la Manifestation organisée en l'honneur du Lieutenant-Général Baron Baltia* (hereafter, Eupen-Malmedy et son Gouverneur) (Bruxelles: L'Imprimerie J.E. Goossens, 1923), 84–92; Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 303.

³³ Erinnerungen, 00087; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 95.

³⁴ Another school in St. Vith was a school of forestry and agriculture, which was described by Baltia as 'a center of Germanization'. However, having sacked the school head, Baltia then replaced him with a pro-Belgian official.

in balancing the rights promised to the German-speaking community under the proclamation with the aims of the assimilationist project. This challenge was most apparent concerning the language question.

Education is a realm that is vulnerable to language conflict, particularly where minority language issues are concerned.³⁵ This was no less the case in Eupen-Malmedy in 1920. The role of education in the formation and inculcation of a collective consciousness, whether as part of the larger project of nation-building or in terms of strengthening local ethnic identities, had a particular pertinence during the interwar period and no less so in Eupen-Malmedy. Since independence in the 1830s, Belgium's history has been dominated by 'the language question', which is usually understood in terms of the Flemish–Walloon conflict. But following the conditional annexation of Eupen-Malmedy, the German language would henceforth form part of any future considerations.³⁶ In the proclamation delivered by Baltia to the people of Eupen-Malmedy on 11 January 1920, the language question was addressed in the seventh article.³⁷ Baltia was aware of its essentiality in terms of identity, particularly in a border area, as he himself was the descendant of Alsatian Germans on his mother's side. A further acknowledgement of the principle of language equality ensured that all *décrets* and *arrêtés* were to be published in both French and German, along with all official state correspondence. The transitory government's approach to dealing with the language question in the districts operated on the premise of two language areas. The French language area comprised Malmedy and some adjacent villages, while in Eupen and St. Vith, German was the dominant language. This division was facilitated by the *Mutterspracheprinzip*, where the mother tongue of a particular region would ostensibly be employed as the language of instruction in schools.³⁸ Under this new dispensation and in keeping

³⁵Magali Boemer & Jeroen Darquennes, 'Language conflict in the educational realm: Eupen-Malmedy in the interbellum period (1920–1940)', in Catharina Peersman, Gijbert Rutten & Rik Vosters (eds.), *Past, Present and Future of a Language Border: German-Romance Encounters in the Low-Countries* (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014), 207–232 (207).

³⁶Boemer & Darquennes, 'Language conflict in the educational realm', 210.

³⁷Proclamation, VII.i.

³⁸Franz Melchior, *Vom deutschen Realgymnasium zum belgischen collège patronné: eine eupener Schule in der Zeit des Übergangs, 1918–1925* (Mémoire de licence, Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve, Bruxelles, 1989) [Unpublished], 60–61.

with the proclamation, from the fifth year of school students would begin to study a second language, be it German or French, depending on the area in which they lived. In his first report, Baltia professed his pride in the fact that his regime did not 'commit the mistake made by the French regime in Alsace-Lorraine', which imposed French as the primary language in the provinces. Neither did he contemplate caving into demands from the Flemish Academy of Belgium to make Flemish the primary language of instruction in the schools of Eupen and St. Vith.³⁹ The Academy had written to Belgian prime minister Delacroix arguing that Eupen was in fact of Flemish origin and that therefore the teaching and administration in the district ought to be conducted through Flemish.⁴⁰ Baltia presented the question to his Superior Council, inviting its members to probe the people of Eupen to see if they wished to adopt Flemish as an official language. The response when it came was unequivocal: 'We certainly want to learn French, because it will serve us to some end, but we do not want to learn Flemish which will never be of use to us for anything.'⁴¹ However, language was not the only area of education that needed to be approached with caution. Particular emphasis was also to be placed on how the past would be articulated. This would be achieved thorough the revision of history school texts.

The teaching of history in the schools of the two *Kreise* was deeply imbued with nationalistic sentiment, which became more pronounced during the war. Reading tasks invariably included material highlighting the glory of the Reich and the halcyon days of the House of Hohenzollern. More recent history manuals up to 1918 provided a detailed description of the war, claiming that Germany had been set upon by its enemies, while the *Francs Tireurs* of Belgium were 'nailed to the pillory of history'.⁴² Publications such as the *Lehrbuch der Geschichte* and *Angewandte Geschichte* related a very different view of the war and its causes from that being taught to schoolchildren in Belgium.⁴³ In the aftermath of the war and in the absence of newly revised material,

³⁹Rapport sur l'activité, i, 127.

⁴⁰Erinnerungen, 00080-1; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 89-90.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Rapport sur l'activité, i, 127.

⁴³Heinrich Wolf, *Angewandte Geschichte: eine Erziehung zum politischen Denken und Wollen* (Leipzig: Verlag von Theodor Weicher, 1920), 472-474.

many of the schoolchildren in Eupen and St. Vith in particular continued to work with pre-war texts. This was also the case across the border in the occupied Rhineland, where the allied administration sought to overhaul the school curriculum. In Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia's Director of Education, Léon Mallinger, set about doing the same.⁴⁴ Mallinger recognized the urgency of introducing a series of revised history textbooks in the German language as a means of recalibrating national consciousness towards Belgium. This view had been articulated for some time in nationalist newspapers in Belgium. The general consensus on where the source of any future change in *mentalité* lay among the country's new Belgians was clear to see:

Education must take on a purely Belgian character. The school books which are used there [Eupen-Malmedy] are filled with praise for great German exploits of German prosperity and superiority. These books must be suppressed. Several teachers are Prussian and judge everything with a Prussian mind.⁴⁵

According to such a perspective, it was now essential that history manuals overwrite the Prussian metanarrative in which the Reich was portrayed as a victim of French and Russian foreign policy and 'the politics of encirclement'.⁴⁶ In the short term, Walloon pupils in Malmedy had to make do with a small geography manual written by a Belgian school-teacher, Monsieur Feller, who was working on a more detailed version. A number of songbooks entitled *Chants Scolaires* were also published, the content of which was to be learned by heart and sung aloud in class in praise of Belgium, its king and its glorious past.⁴⁷ By 1921, a Belgian history manual, *Lesebuch für die Volksschulen Belgiens*, presented a combination of geographical facts and historical perspectives in praise

⁴⁴Mallinger was born and raised in Luxembourg and Luxembourgish was his mother tongue. He was also fluent in German and French. Melchior, 'Vom deutschen Realgymnasium', 55–56.

⁴⁵*La Libre Belgique*, 10 July 1919; AAEB, 10.792/5369, Eupen-Malmedy Chef de Cabinet to Hymans, 11 July 1919.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Rapport sur l'activité, i, 96; Hubert Willems, Enseignement secondaire, professionnel industriel et agricole à Eupen–Malmedy–Saint-Vith au lendemain du traité de Versailles (1920–1940) (Bruxelles, 1990) [Unpublished], 5–12.

of Belgium, with little or no mention of Germany apart from a brief reference to Aachen. A sketch depicting Belgian soldiers at the Front states, 'These Belgian soldiers fought in the Great War. A country that educates such men cannot be defeated, cannot perish.' Germany is never referred to by name; instead, the term '*das Feind*' (enemy) is inserted. A chapter entitled *Die Heimat* briefly emphasized the local history of Eupen-Malmedy. Here again mention of either the Prussian or German period was absent.⁴⁸ If the German perspective of the past could so easily be erased, there still remained ample opportunity for renegade teachers to include or exclude information which they found unpalatable. Many teachers inveighed against the way in which their Prussian/German past was being overwritten with the palimpsest of a Belgian narrative.⁴⁹

Regardless of replacing a German-centred version of the past with a Belgian one, Baltia's proclamation had promised King Albert's putative subjects that 'your language will be respected' and that 'French and German [would] be on an absolute equal footing'. However, a number of obstacles presented themselves in terms of facilitating German as the language of instruction in Eupen and St. Vith. Although a body of teaching staff fluent in German was already in place, this had somewhat diminished through the voluntary departure of a number of teachers to Germany following the outcome of the consultation. Their number was further diluted by the expulsion of certain individuals for anti-Belgian activity during the period of the consultation. What Baltia identified as 'the most problematic issue' facing the transitory government in the realm of education was how to deal with what he saw as a recalcitrant teaching staff.⁵⁰ He complained of how the teaching body 'used every ruse and method, however menacing, to intimidate pupils and their parents'.⁵¹ Several teachers loyal to Germany were said to have routinely spread anti-Belgian propaganda within the confines of the schoolroom, working through the parents of the children to incite fear and loathing towards the provisional government.⁵² One of the chief players

⁴⁸J. Lousberg, *Lesebuch für die Volksschulen Belgiens* (Eupen: Defoer, 1921).

⁴⁹Selm Wenselaers, '*Faire des bons belges*': *Nationaliseringsprocessen in de Oostkantons tijdens het Interbellum* (Antwerpen, Manteau, 2007), 44–46.

⁵⁰Rapport sur l'activité, i, 129.

⁵¹Rapport sur l'activité, i, 124.

⁵²Rapport sur l'activité, iii, 90.

identified in this dissident grouping was the school inspector Kotschok and his wife. Baltia had considered issuing an expulsion order against the Kotschoks, but he instead decided against this on the grounds that Kotschok was too ill. Schulte was another school inspector who, it was thought, had been in favour of the annexation to Belgium, but was now believed to have been playing a double game; he was not alone.⁵³

A core group of dissident teachers met regularly to discuss the various *arrêtés* and *décrets* introduced by the Eupen-Malmedy government. Baltia blamed the reluctance by so many teachers to say definitively whether they would remain in their posts on malicious rumours being put about by these pro-German activists.⁵⁴ Throughout the entire period of the popular consultation, only twelve teachers of German extraction had declared their willingness to remain in Eupen-Malmedy in the event that the vote went in favour of Belgium. Following the termination of the consultation in July, 71 teachers had either resigned their positions or were forced to do so. All either hailed from the newly acquired territories or had been resident there for some time. In reaction to the negative impact following the departure of such a high number of teachers, Baltia argued that the more reasonable in society would interpret the development as a clearing out of the deadwood. By the same token, he believed that they could only welcome the improved pedagogical environment in which their children would be educated.⁵⁵ In spite of this rather optimistic and somewhat disingenuous interpretation of events in his official reports, Baltia at the same time acknowledged the continuing challenges which the arena of education posed to his regime, and the degree to which he would have to compromise on some of his plans to transform the education system in the districts.

One way in which Baltia attempted to entice a number of teachers from inside Belgium was to offer better pay and conditions. Prospective teachers who were willing to transfer were offered an annual salary of 3,650 francs. However, this measure stirred resentment among the teaching staff already in place as much as it did among their counterparts in Belgium. Following an intervention from Brussels, the inducement was rescinded, which resulted in a renewed exodus of teaching staff.

⁵³Willems, *Enseignement secondaire*, 14.

⁵⁴Pabst, *Eupen-Malmedy*, 299.

⁵⁵Rapport sur l'activité, i, 124.

The severe shortage of suitable teaching staff forced Baltia eventually to look eastwards to the occupied Rhineland for willing recruits. A number of retired German teachers were signed up. In one instance, a German teacher who had signed the register of protest during the popular consultation was reappointed.⁵⁶ Certain transient teachers were also employed to teach either German or French in villages lacking suitable personnel. In any event, the proficiency in German of many of the teachers coming to the districts from Belgium left much to be desired. Taking the longer-term approach towards ensuring that a sufficient number of suitably qualified German teachers were on hand to facilitate future generations of German-speaking Belgians, the Belgian authorities established a German section in the *École Normale* in Verviers in 1921. However, the uptake was slow, and in the short term at least the initiative seemed to have little impact.⁵⁷ Another teacher training school operated in Arlon with a German section attached. However, the majority of students continued to pursue their teacher training in the religious colleges in old Belgium at Theux, Bastogne, Carlsbourg and Belgny where lectures were delivered uniquely in French.⁵⁸

Eupen presented a particularly difficult prospect for Baltia in terms of reconfiguring the school system, and in particular the teaching staff. Although he never hid his desire to 'send these recalcitrant masters back to Germany', the pressing problem of how to replace them with similarly qualified teaching staff remained unresolved.⁵⁹ Baltia wished to take the schools in Eupen out of the hands of its pro-German administrators, but was mindful of exacerbating an already intractable problem. Once the League of Nations had finally endorsed the annexation of Eupen-Malmedy by Belgium on 20 September 1920, teachers throughout the annexed districts demanded an extension of two years to decide whether they wished to become Belgian or depart to Germany. The request for an extension fell on deaf ears, except in the case of two schools in Eupen,

⁵⁶Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 91–92.

⁵⁷Boemer & Darquennes, Language conflict in the educational realm, 214; J. Dries, Schule, Ausbildung und Hochschule in der DG, in A. Begeat-Neuschäfer (ed.), *Belgien im Fokus 3—Die Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens, Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 139–167 (141–142).

⁵⁸Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 305; Dries, Schule, Ausbildung und Hochschule in der DG, 142.

⁵⁹Rapport sur l'activité, i, 129.

the *Realgymnasium* and the *Hildegardis Lyzeum*, where the German system of education was maintained until the autumn of 1921.⁶⁰ For Baltia, not to have given this extension would only have worsened the staffing problems in the schools. The German historian Klaus Pabst identified the staffing issue in the schools as of equal importance to the reform of local government in the districts, and even more important in terms of the project of national assimilation.⁶¹ However, it was not only the teaching body that posed difficulties for Baltia. Pupils too were deserting their schools in favour of institutions across the border in Germany.

Students from the region who attended universities in Germany prior to the annexation had initially been allowed to continue their education there. However, since the signing of the Versailles Treaty, both the *Realgymnasium* and the *Hildegardis Lyzeum* at Eupen had lost a lot of pupils to schools in the Rhineland. Many parents from Eupen and its hinterland continued to send their children across the border to Germany to continue their education in Aachen, a practice which pre-dated the border. However, Baltia understood this practice as one where students would be 'penetrated by German ideas that were hostile to the new regime'.⁶² This practice would soon be prohibited, as German school diplomas were no longer recognized in Belgium following a decree issued on 20 October 1921.⁶³ The decree stipulated that 'primary or middle-school studies undertaken in Germany or in Austria after 31 December 1921, and the diplomas and certificates pertaining to these studies will no longer be valid'.⁶⁴ The measure was deemed essential in ensuring that this important pillar of the assimilationist project continued to act as a bulwark against anti-Belgian sentiment. In spite of these measures, however, quite a number of parents were happy to continue to contravene the new law. This forced Baltia to issue a further

⁶⁰Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 89.

⁶¹Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 299–300.

⁶²*Rapport sur l'activité*, iii, 48.

⁶³Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 88–90.

⁶⁴Arrêté relative aux certificates d'études primaires ou moyennes, 20 October 1921, *Journal Officiel/Amtsblatt Malmedy-Eupen* (hereafter JOME), No. 19, 5 November 1921, 172; Melchior, Vom deutschen Realgymnasium, 63.

arrêté warning parents that they would face sanctions if they removed their children from school 'without justification'.⁶⁵

Within days of Baltia coming to power, the director of education at the *Realgymnasium* in Eupen, Dr Kreutzberg, expressed concern over the exodus of students to Germany. Around one-fifth of the student body had departed from the school since the signing of the Versailles Treaty. Kreutzberg warned of further depletion if 'hasty changes' were made to the curriculum. He offered a compromise to Baltia, which stipulated that if moderate changes were made to the curriculum, he would cooperate fully with the transitory government.⁶⁶ The head of the *Hildegardis Lyzeum* in Eupen, Alexander Pottgieser, had been anxious for Baltia to reveal his plans, and like Kreutzberg feared that the schools which up to then had been subsidized by the German state would no longer be able to operate due to the falling number of registered students. Pottgieser also railed against the oath of allegiance, which all public officials and teaching staff had to take, and about which the teaching body had serious reservations.

Baltia was left with little enough room to manoeuvre without risking further aggravation in the education sector. To assuage the concerns of the school principals, he agreed to formulate a revised version of the oath of allegiance, which would now read: 'I pledge my honor and conscience to fulfil my duties as faithfully as ever. I am determined to follow conscientiously the instructions of the High Commissioner.'⁶⁷ Here, the word 'follow' replaced that of 'obey', which appeared in the text of the original oath. The new formulation was agreeable to all sides. Baltia also promised to match the subsidies formerly paid to the schools by Germany. However, his plan to transform the *Realgymnasium* into a Belgian state-run *athénée* met with stiff opposition from parents and teachers alike. A later proposal that the school become a type of 'reform-Gymnasium' containing both a German and Belgian department was considered. Following a visit to the territory by the Minister for Arts and Sciences Jules Destrée in the summer of 1920, another possibility emerged, one which would definitively transform how public instruction was delivered in Eupen.

⁶⁵Arrêté prise en exécution de la loi sur l'obligation scolaire, 10 April 1922, JOME, No. 42, 10, 15 April 1922.

⁶⁶Melchior, Vom deutschen Realgymnasium, 68.

⁶⁷*Eupener Nachrichten*, 5 February 1920; Melchior, Vom deutschen Realgymnasium zum belgischen collège patronné, 69.

In his memoirs, Baltia recounts how he first asked whether Destrée might supply him with additional teaching staff. Destrée indicated that this seemed an impossibility. Then Baltia confided to him his 'embarrassment over the educational situation in Eupen', and suggested that he may have no option but to approach the Archbishop of Liège with the aim of turning the *Realschule* into a *collège patronné*. If this were accepted, the vast majority of the teaching staff at the college would be priests. He did not think that this would appeal to the socialist minister. However, he believed that the people of Eupen would feel less threatened by pedagogues who were Catholic clerics than by Belgian lay teachers. Prior to Destrée's arrival, Baltia was apprehensive that the incumbent minister for arts and sciences, being a socialist, would be opposed to the idea of a denominational school replacing the *Realschule* in Eupen.

But Destrée had travelled a transformative political journey since early in his political career as an outspoken advocate of Walloon independence and a founding member of the *Assemblée wallonne* in 1912. That same year, Destrée penned a letter to Belgium's king, arguing that '[y]ou rule over two nations ... Walloons and Flemings. There are no Belgians.' The letter was an open acknowledgement of the growing cultural and political cleavage between Flemish and Walloon communities.⁶⁸ However, the war had served to reignite a potent sense of Belgian nationalism, and now Destrée, in his capacity as minister for arts and sciences, demonstrated the impact of this national renaissance. In his introductory contribution to a primary school textbook of 'patriotic lessons' produced by the Catholic bishops of Belgium, Destrée wrote how 'the painful effects of the war have shown the essential importance of national sentiment'.⁶⁹ Now as a government minister responsible for education, he expected that this sentiment would germinate in Eupen-Malmedy also. After a short intake of breath, Destrée conceded that in this instance 'patriotic interest must trump all other considerations', and thus he offered no opposition to

⁶⁸Jules Destrée, Lettre au roi sur la separation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre, *Revue de Belgique*, 15 August 1912, 36–38; For an English version of the letter see: Jules Destrée Open letter to the king concerning the separation of Flanders and Wallonia, in Theo Hermans, Louis Vos & Lode Wils, *The Flemish Movement: A Documentary History, 1780–1990* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), 206–217.

⁶⁹Jules Destrée, 'Introduction', in *Leçons patriotique à l'usage du personnel enseignant des écoles primaires* (Bruxelles: Conseil Central de l'Enseignement Catholique, 1921).

Baltia's plan for the *Realgymnasium*.⁷⁰ The school thus became a *collège patronné* under the auspices of the Archbishop of Liège, and proved a veritable success as student numbers increased and the great uncertainty surrounding the school's future was finally put to rest.⁷¹

In terms of the wider realm of education, Baltia promoted the idea of a *conseil de l'enseignement* (education council), which his government established in 1920 with Léon Mallinger at its head. The council's *raison d'être* ostensibly was to oversee pedagogic practice in the territory. Its vice-president was Joseph Caffitz from Rocherath. Caffitz was a Protestant minister whose inclusion in the council was purportedly to signify the government's appreciation of the Christian community's contribution to the administration of the school system. During the popular consultation he purportedly noted as in informed on anti-Belgian society. His appointment was rather perfunctory, however, and was more an attempt to appease clerics, whether Catholic or Protestant, who felt aggrieved following the abolition of school inspections conducted by members of the clergy.⁷² Although the abandonment of the practice had been roundly opposed by the vast majority of clerics in the territory, it had already been dispensed with in Germany, first at secondary level in the late eighteenth century and later at primary level under the Weimar Republic.⁷³ The appointment of a Protestant cleric may be explained also by the fact that it was unlikely that any Catholic cleric would have accepted a place on the council, not least as at that stage the popular consultation had not as yet run its course and many still hoped that Belgium would fail to secure the territory.

Initially at least the council appeared to be as inclusive and representative as could have been expected. Three members of the council—Alexander Pottgieser, who was director of the *Hildegardis*

⁷⁰Erinnerungen, 00086; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 94–95.

⁷¹Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 304.

⁷²Melchior, *Vom deutschen Realgymnasium zum belgischen collège patronné*, 58.

⁷³Inspection of secondary schools by members of the clergy had been abolished in Prussia following the establishment of the *Oberschulkollegium* (Secondary School Board) under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance in 1787. This would now become the responsibility of the state. In 1808 its role was usurped by a government department *Sektion für den Kultus und den öffentlichen Unterricht* which was overseen by the Ministry of the Interior. R.H. Samuel & R. Hinton Thomas, *Education and Society in Modern Germany* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1949), 91.

Lyzeum in Eupen, Heinrich Kreutzberg (director of the *Real Gymnasium* in Eupen) and Heinrich Schulte—were staunchly pro-German in their outlook. However, after 1921 these three members were replaced by members whose compass of national sentiment was very much pointed towards Belgium.⁷⁴ The education council initially comprised just twelve members, but this was later increased to fifteen following the inclusion of three heads of family (all male) who were added ostensibly to give parents a greater say in terms of how the schools were managed.⁷⁵ Baltia portrayed the inclusion of parents on the enlarged council as demonstrating 'how the Belgian administration was concerned with taking account of the legitimate wishes of parents around the teaching material'. However, in practice parents were not allowed any say in the administration of schools, as in the creation of a parents' council for example, as both Baltia and Mallinger feared that 'our Belgian personnel would not be prepared for such an inquisition on the part of the German population'.⁷⁶ Instead, parents had to settle for being invited to school evenings of a less formal nature.

Ostensibly no member of the teaching profession could be disciplined without the education council's consent, as stipulated by the *arrêté* of 6 March 1920 establishing the council. However, a *décret* in March 1921 ordered that '[d]ecisions concerning the suspension and revocation of these agents (the teaching personnel) are taken by the communal council, be it by its own initiative, be it on the recommendation of our arts and sciences advisor, under the same conditions behind closed doors...'⁷⁷ Thus, the degree to which the education council exerted any influence on the administration of schools in the territory is a moot point, as the final decision rested with Mallinger, and by extension with Baltia, who had the power to overrule any decision made at communal level.⁷⁸

There were several instances when teachers had been relieved of their duties following direct correspondence from the high commissioner. One such case involved the prefect of the *athénée* in Malmedy,

⁷⁴'Arrêté concernant l'institution d'un conseil de l'enseignement', 6 March 1920, *Recueil*, i, 42–43; Melchior, *Vom deutschen Realgymnasium*, 56–57.

⁷⁵'Arrêté apportant des modifications à celui du 6 Mars 1920 par lequel est institué un Conseil de l'Enseignement', 16 December 1920, *Recueil*, ii, 136.

⁷⁶Melchior, *Vom deutschen Realgymnasium*, 57; Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 91.

⁷⁷Henri Pirard, *Chambre*, 16 January 1923.

⁷⁸Melchior, *Vom deutschen Realgymnasium*, 58–59.

Francis Duchêne. Prior to the annexation of Eupen-Malmedy, Duchêne had been a teacher at the *athénée* in Huy, where Mallinger was prefect. Mallinger convinced Duchêne to take up the position of prefect in Malmedy. Within a short time, it appeared that relations between Duchêne and Baltia's head of education had become strained. Duchêne offered his resignation to Baltia in July 1921, on the grounds that he was being undermined at every turn by Mallinger. He asked Baltia if he could find a suitable post for him inside occupied Germany, 'as his dignity no longer permitted him to return as a teacher to a Belgian *athénée*'.⁷⁹ Duchêne's offer of resignation was refused, but some months later Baltia was berating the prefect for disobeying instructions from his immediate superior, Mallinger. In September 1922, Mallinger wrote to inform Duchêne that he had 'been granted a vacation of indefinite duration'. Later, on 28 October, Baltia issued a *décret* stating that Duchêne had been relieved of his role as prefect and would henceforth be at the disposal of the Belgian minister for sciences and arts. Duchêne was eventually reassigned to his former position in Huy. In this instance, the education council, so vaunted by Baltia as a safeguard of the interests of teachers, was not consulted, nor was the communal council. In a slight modification to Article 84 of Belgium's communal law, which was introduced to the cantons in 1921, Baltia reserved the right to dismiss teaching personnel in the communes. He was therefore reluctant to leave control of the schools entirely in the hands of the communal councils.⁸⁰

A major milestone on the road to integration with the Belgian education system was passed in May 1922 with the introduction of the Belgian 'Law on the Introduction of Compulsory Education' of 1914, better known as the Poulet Law after the Belgian politician Prosper Poulet, who devised the initial legislation. The Poulet Law introduced compulsory and free education up to the age of 14. This law was again premised on the *Mutterspracheprinzip*, while ensuring that a second language be taught from the fifth year of school. Therefore, children in the Walloon-inhabited areas of the cantons would begin to receive instruction in German from their fifth year of schooling and those in the German-speaking districts and the surrounding hinterland would be

⁷⁹Annales Parlementaires (APB), Sénat, 16 January 1923.

⁸⁰Rapport sur l'activité, iii, 60.

introduced to the French language in a similar fashion.⁸¹ However, in a very short time Baltia altered this particular arrangement by applying aspects of the legislation intended for the German-speaking towns of 'old Belgium', such as Arlon and Montzen, where French was taught from the first school year. This arrangement stayed in place until the provisional government's termination in 1925.⁸² This was in spite of the fact that the communal councils retained the power to reverse the measure. Baltia strongly defended what many understood to be a breach of trust as something that would reap benefits for pupils in the future in terms of finding employment and pursuing a professional career inside Belgium.

By the summer of 1922, Baltia professed his confidence that the middle schools of the territory had been stripped of their 'German character'.⁸³ Despite the gravity of the staffing situation within the wider school system, Baltia remained hopeful of being able to uproot German influence from all aspects of schooling, and looked forward to the day when having left primary school, the youth would be 'torn from the influence of their former German masters and won over to Belgium'. He added that it would only be 'when our school master seconded by a clergy of truly Belgian sentiment, will penetrate beyond the walls of his classroom that the 'Belgicization' of the new territories will be a *fait accompli*'.⁸⁴ However, this aspiration rang hollow with those who felt that Baltia's government had mishandled the issues affecting education in the region and that, far from ridding the schools of their German character, his actions had ignited a greater passion among the German speaking population around their language and their heritage. Speaking in the Belgian *Sénat* in January 1923, the socialist senator for Verviers, Henri Pirard, questioned the legitimacy of Baltia's arbitrary actions, stating that '[i]t is understood ... that when this functionary (Baltia) in the exercise of his full powers, has rendered a decree, it is beholding of him to respect it as long as it remains operative'.⁸⁵ Pirard described as precarious the state of education in the districts, and deemed it 'a situation

⁸¹The Pouillet Law was passed by both houses of the Belgian parliament in May 1914. However, due to the war, the stipulation on compulsory education was only evident from 1919. Pabst, 'Eupen-Malmedy', 302.

⁸²Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 303; Melchior, *Vom deutschen Realgymnasium*, 64.

⁸³Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 303; *Rapport sur l'activité*, iii, 44.

⁸⁴*Rapport sur l'activité*, iii, 52.

⁸⁵APB, Henri Pirard, *Sénat*, 16 January 1923, 271.

that could singularly compromise the assimilation project'.⁸⁶ Be that as it may, the schoolrooms of Eupen-Malmedy were not the only spaces in which a project of education was under way. Beyond the confines of the classroom, another form of education was unfolding, one that did not dictate the past to a passive audience, but which nevertheless aimed at transforming mindsets through empathy and engagement with the distant as well as the recent past. Essential to this process was accommodating communities across the cantons in acknowledging the sacrifices made by their family members and loved ones during the Great War. This acknowledgement, however, was fused with a recognition that such forms of commemoration and mourning would have to be absorbed within the fabric of the Belgian national narrative.

BATTLEFIELDS OF MEMORY: REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

Memory is a process often performed by the collective whereby significant past events are framed through the installation and erection of public monuments, exhibitions and memorial sites. A 'concretion of identity' sees the collective establish a certain version of the past. But no rendition of past events is permanent, as each is renegotiated within the contemporary framework of a given period in time.⁸⁷ As Andreas Fickers has demonstrated, this is a process which attempts to create a homogenous view of the past, but in so doing, is necessarily selective.⁸⁸ The collective memory shared by the inhabitants of Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith up to their annexation by Belgium would now have to fit within the frame of the 'official memory' of Belgium. The official memory, as constructed by the authorities in the region and in the wider Belgian state, would inevitably conflict with versions of the past forged in the minds of those who not only lived through the war and its aftermath, but had inherited the collective memory of previous generations.

⁸⁶ APB, Henri Pirard, *Sénat*, 16 January 1923, 268.

⁸⁷ Jan Assmann & John Czaplicka, Collective memory and cultural identity, *New German Critique*, 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring–Summer, 1995), 125–133 (130).

⁸⁸ Andreas Fickers, Über Nutzen und Nachteil der Histoire für Ostbelgien: Von der Bewältigung überwältigt? in Andreas Fickers, Carlo Lejeune and Freddy Cremer, *Spuren in die Zukunft: Anmerkungen zu einem bewegten Jahrhundert* (Büllingen: Lexis, 2001), 77–85.

Baltia insisted on the urgency of appreciating what he termed the 'psychological awareness' (*connaissances psychologiques*) of a people so that they may be better governed. Although in his opinion this task 'had barely begun', a number of initiatives were already under way to gain the trust of a still largely suspicious population.⁸⁹ A *décret* passed on 14 January 1921 established the Royal Commission for Monuments and Sites, the creation of which was to fill a void in terms of recognizing 'the artistic riches that the districts of Eupen and Malmedy possessed', which included its ruins, monuments and heritage sites, in order to prevent their 'regrettable disappearance'.⁹⁰ These sites could thus continue to serve their function as *lieux de mémoire* of a time now lost, thus allowing for the localization of collective memory formation, away from the grand narrative of the state. Baltia made himself president of the commission and members included Justice Nys from Eupen and a businessman, Peter Jérusalem, while in Malmedy they included the abbot Joseph Bastin and the publicist and fellow Club Wallon member Henri Bragard.⁹¹

A day after the *décret* establishing the Commission for Monuments and Sites was issued, a further *décret* provided for the establishment of a folklore commission charged with collecting documents and objects of folkloric interest and popular culture. The folklore commission was funded out of the education budget. Members included the district commissioner, Léon Xhaflaire, and once again Bastin and Bragard were prominent. The organization comprised three autonomous sections from each district, which independently regulated their own activity. It was anticipated that museums of folklore would be established in Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith. An article printed in *XXè siècle* in February 1922 revealed how the commission had taken its example from Germany, which 'methodically, meticulously, and patiently revived the old legends, putting the traits of that race into sharp relief'. In this way, it stated, the population of Germany was 'given a common character and allowed for the development of an immense attachment to

⁸⁹Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 99.

⁹⁰Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 101.

⁹¹For more on the function of *lieux de mémoire*, see: Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (Arthur Goldhammer, trans.) (3 vols.), I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

the native soil, to the race, to the *patrie*'.⁹² In this light, it seemed that the folklore commission was to act as a bridge between the past and the present in allowing the communities of 'new Belgium', both Walloon and German, the space and opportunity in which to cherish their respective pasts, while simultaneously becoming absorbed into the Belgian nation. In June 1923, Baltia officiated over the opening ceremony of the Museum of Folklore in Eupen, which took place at the *École Gardienne de la Ville Basse* on the banks of the Vesdre. In his speech, the president of the Eupen branch of the commission, the school inspector Bernard Lousberg, thanked Baltia for his generosity as well as his 'moral and material support' in ensuring that the museum became a reality. Baltia delivered his response in German, and highlighted the immense pedagogical, moral, aesthetic, and social value attaching to a folklore museum.⁹³ If the folklore commission was a bridge to the past, the provisional government would also have to construct a link to the future, through the reshaping of the region's collective memory framed within the contours of the Belgian state, and in particular with regard to the memory of the Great War.

The process of collective memory formation, whether by the state or certain groups and organizations within the state, is always a complex and continually negotiated process. This is something that was already apparent at the transitory regime's inception. Comprised of two distinct communities under a German flag up to the end of the First World War, that infernal conflict had seen ethnic Walloon and German combatants fight side by side, as they had done previously in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and later the Franco-Prussian War. To commemorate the fallen of those two previous conflicts, the people of Malmédy erected a monument in the centre of the Place de Rome in 1904. Atop the granite pedestal stood the figure of a Prussian infantryman holding a flag in his left hand and brandishing a drawn sword in his right. His tenacious posture was a fitting tribute to the bravery of those who had fought so valiantly for the *Kaiserreich*. The atmosphere in the town on Sunday 26 June 1904, when the monument was officially unveiled, was charged with patriotic fervour. The Place de Rome was awash with the black, red,

⁹²En terre rédimé: Le folklore de Malmédy-Eupen, *XXè Siècle*, 30 June 1923.

⁹³À Eupen: Le Lieutenant-Général Baron Baltia inaugure le musée du folklore, *La Meuse*, 30 June 1923.

and white of the Empire and the traditional green, yellow and black of Malmedy. The military orchestra from the camp at Elsenborn infused the summer air with jubilant renditions of patriotic standards. The dedication under an image of the Kaiser which graced one side of the granite pedestal read: 'To the memory of Kaiser Wilhelm I and his warriors from the canton of Malmedy, faithful to him until death.' In the wake of the war, the imposing edifice remained at the centre of celebrations for those marking the Kaiser's birthday on 27 January 1919. However, between that date and the installation of the Eupen-Malmedy government in 1920, attitudes towards the imposing structure began to alter.⁹⁴ Shortly after his appointment as high commissioner, Baltia ordered the removal of the edifice.⁹⁵ Andreas Fickers argues that in this way the inhabitants of 'new Belgium' had fallen victim to Belgium's nationalist history, engendered by Pierre Nothomb and the *Comité de Politique Nationale*.⁹⁶ But as Philippe Beck points out, this was not the case in Eupen where a similar war monument dedicated to the veterans of 1866 and 1870 still stands.⁹⁷ While the dismantling of the *Kriegerdenkmal* in Malmedy may be understood as a first step in the remaking of the territory's mnemonic landscape, that same process would also involve the erection of a number of memorials to render homage to the fallen and the disappeared of the Great War, and to honour the efforts made by those veterans who survived, thus facilitating a process of remembrance within the contours of the collective memory of the local community.

The newly created Royal Commission of Monuments and Sites, in cooperation with the communal councils, oversaw the erection of

⁹⁴Raymond Jacob, *Malmédiens sous les drapeaux (troisième partie)*, *Malmedy Folklore*, 58 (1999–2000), 253–316 (311–315); *La Semaine*, 2 July 1904.

⁹⁵In 1921, the pedestal was removed to the cemetery in Malmedy, where it became the base for a monument to those Malmédians who had fallen in the Great War. Jacob, 'Malmédiens sous les drapeaux', 315. Another war monument was erected in Eupen in 1912 in honour of combatants from Eupen who had fallen at the battle of Sodowa during the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars. The Eupen war monument features a statue of St. George slaying a dragon and still dominates Place Werth in the centre of the town. Yves Dubois, 'Les monuments commémoratifs de la Grande Guerre en province de Liège', [unpublished thesis] (Université de Liège, 2011), 22; Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 161–162.

⁹⁶Andreas Fickers, *Gedächtnisopfer: Erinnern und Vergessen in der Vergangenheitspolitik der deutschsprachigen Belgier im 20. Jahrhundert*, Abschnitt 15.

⁹⁷Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 161–162.

edifices commemorating the heroes of the Great War. A number of characteristics distinguished the war monuments erected in all three districts of new Belgium from those that appeared elsewhere in the country. One was that the monuments in the cantons had more individual names inscribed on them compared with monuments elsewhere in Belgium. The death toll during the war of those who hailed from Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith was proportionately greater than in the rest of Belgium, in France or in Germany, at over 2.8% of the population.⁹⁸ Another distinguishing characteristic of the monuments erected throughout the cantons was that the vast majority of them were erected either inside a church, or on its grounds. This particular characteristic was no doubt influenced by the provisional government's prohibition on the use of monuments for political purposes, or for any form of commemoration other than a religious ceremony. Another restriction concerned the depiction of symbols on monuments. These had to be 'impartial' so as 'to avoid friction'.⁹⁹ However, as Max Neumann points out, on some occasions the authorities failed to detect monument inscriptions that contravened the rules, as in the case of the commemorative plaque in Mackenbach in the district of St. Vith, which was unveiled in 1923. The plaque's dedication read, 'German men fallen in the field', while in Raeren a commemorative altar displayed an Iron Cross.¹⁰⁰ The lack of controversy around this latter monument was all the more surprising when viewed against Baltia's prohibition on the wearing of Germans Milton medals and insignias.¹⁰¹ Whatever the reasons as to why these few exceptions were either overlooked or tolerated, in the majority of cases, collective memory formation, particularly among families who

⁹⁸Philippe Beck puts the total number of war victims at 1,848. However, in addition to 1,800 who had died or were unaccounted for in battle, a further 891 returned either maimed or mentally scarred. Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 76; Rapport sur l'activité, i, 148.

⁹⁹Max Neumann, *Les monuments aux morts de la Grande Guerre des cantons d'Eupen, de Malmedy et de Sankt-Vith entre 1918–1940, des témoins d'un drame identitaire* (Université catholique de Louvain, 2015) [Unpublished], 43 & 107.

¹⁰⁰Neumann, *Les monuments aux morts de la Grande Guerre*, 108–109.

¹⁰¹Christoph Brüll, *Verbotene Erinnerung? Die Neu-Belgier und der Erste Weltkrieg (1918–1925)*, in *Quand les canons se taisent: Actes du colloque international organisé par les Archives de l'État et le Musée royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire militaire* (Bruxelles, 3–6 November 2008) (Bruxelles: Archives Générales du Royaume, 2010), 555–568 (561).

continued to hold to a German identity, was constrained within the limits set out by Baltia.

The prohibitions as applied to monuments and sites of mourning were paralleled by a latent yet effective control of the press in the region, as has been noted previously. The *Annales* historian, Jack Goody, asserts that 'in all societies, individuals hold a large quantity of information in their genetic heritage, in their long-term memory, and temporarily in their active memory'.¹⁰² The absence, whether voluntary or involuntary, of collective memory within communities can cause serious problems of collective identity and coherency. This results in an inability to articulate one's identity or sense of belonging with reference to the past.¹⁰³ While the 'organized amnesia' argument put forward by Fickers has some merit, it is important to note that all states are particularly discerning in writing their national narratives. The collective memory of a state is far too selectively construed, however, to account for the diversity of experience and the degree of moral and mental confusion that the trauma of war can bring. While a dominant narrative overwrites the palimpsest of the past, what occurs is merely the subordination of those alternative or rival narratives and not necessarily their *damnatio memoriae*. For the inhabitants of 'new Belgium', commemoration was a local endeavour first and foremost and something which brought together families of the fallen, who wished to mourn their loved ones and honour their selfless sacrifice whether for *Heimat*, *patrie* or *Vaterland*. In this way, within the miniscule territory of Eupen-Malmedy commemoration was not a homogenous process. Pro-Belgian and pro-German mourned their dead within the confines of their particular post-war situation. Their mourning in the first instance, revolved around the family. Nevertheless, the watchful eye of the Eupen-Malmedy government ensured that such practices were closely monitored and the speeches vetted in advance. Such was the case on 25 June 1922 during the inauguration of tombstones marking the graves of 58 German soldiers and 38 soldiers from Eupen, buried at the Friedhof Eupen.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Jack Goody, *Mémoire et apprentissage dans les sociétés avec et sans écriture: La transmission du Bagre, L'Homme* (17) (1977), 29–52 (3–5).

¹⁰³Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (Steven Rendall & Elizabeth Claman, trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 53.

¹⁰⁴Christoph Brüll & Werner Mießen, 'Den Gefallenen der beiden Weltkriegen. Eupen und das Gedenken an seine toten Weltkriegssoldaten', in Krarel Velle, Claude de Moreau

For its part, the Belgian state, together with the provisional government, was equally anxious to smooth over the cracks in the national post-war narrative. In 1922, the government designated 11 November a national holiday, which also applied inside 'new Belgium'. While Philippe Beck argues that the extension of the holiday at this time to the cantons was 'an unintended, tactless and awkward act',¹⁰⁵ it nevertheless sent a message to the people of Eupen-Malmedy that their mourning was every bit as valid as that of the rest of Belgium. The government invited 40 ex-combatants from Eupen-Malmedy to assist in the Armistice Day commemoration in Brussels. Some forty members of the *Associations d'Invalides des Districts d'Eupen, Malmedy et La Calamine* travelled to Brussels to pay homage at the tomb of the unknown Belgian soldier. The representatives laid a wreath of chrysanthemums tied in the Belgian national colours intertwined with those of Eupen, Malmedy and La Calamine with an inscription that read: 'The veterans, ex-combatants of Eupen, Malmédy [sic] St. Vith and La Calamine to their Comrade, the unknown Belgian soldier.' In Malmedy, *La Semaine* newspaper reported that the contribution made by the veterans' association 'received widespread and positive commentary in the mainstream Belgian press'.¹⁰⁶ It cited *l'Echo de la Bourse*, which reported that 'the populations [sic] were integrated in their hearts into the Belgian community' and stated that the gesture constituted 'a solemn and sincere expression of their ardent loyalty'. A week later, a nine-member delegation from the same veterans' association was invited to inaugurate their flag at a ceremony hosted by the *Association Nationale des Combattants* in Brussels. Monsieur Abinet, a member of the delegation from Eupen-Malmedy, offered a poignant insight into the minds of his fellow veterans from the cantons:

It is time, for once and for all to tear up the veil of legends. The occasion presents itself to us today, to express, for the first time, to the Belgian nation, our profoundest thought: accept that we seize the opportunity, and deign to hear us. There cannot be two sorts of Belgians in Belgium, those who have all of the praise and all the smiles and those for whom so often

de Gerbehaye & Els Herrebout, *Liber amicorum Alfred Minke* (Bruxelles: Archives Générales du Royaume, 2011), 185.

¹⁰⁵ Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 165.

¹⁰⁶ *La Semaine*, 18 November 1922.

suspicious are reserved, if not insults. During the war, bowed and submissive under the imperious necessity of laws, we did our duty under another banner to that of yours, but we were not the last, once we knew the truth, to deplore the crime to which we had been ignorant accomplices.¹⁰⁷

Other initiatives aimed at creating a sense of oneness with the rest of Belgium were undertaken at a local level by Belgium's King Albert, who visited the territory on three occasions throughout the lifetime of the transitory period. Albert had first come to the cantons in a personal capacity in May 1920, when he flew into Elsenborn camp to inspect three artillery regiments of the Belgian army. The brief stop may be interpreted as an endorsement of Baltia's efforts.¹⁰⁸ The king's first official visit to the region took place a year later on 15 June 1921. During this visit, he availed himself of the opportunity to decorate 32 of his new subjects, including the six local members of the Superior Council of Eupen-Malmedy, as well as a number of communal councillors from Malmedy who had been keen advocates of the annexation by Belgium. As well as these, he honoured magistrates, priests and administrators who had proven their loyalty to Belgium during the allied occupation.¹⁰⁹ The king returned for a third and final visit on 27 June 1922 to partake once again in a military ceremony.¹¹⁰ These visits by Belgium's reigning monarch were well received by the local population.¹¹¹

However, the king was aware of the potential for trouble, or at least criticism from anti-Belgian elements. According to Baltia in his book on Albert I, which he wrote in honour of the king who died unexpectedly in a climbing accident in 1934, Albert understood that all it would take was for 'one individual to protest, so that the German newspapers, which are hostile to us, print the following day that: the king went to Eupen and to Malmedy and that he was jeered'. Although descended from the German

¹⁰⁷ *La Semaine*, 25 November 1922.

¹⁰⁸ Rapport sur l'activité, i, 20; Herman Baltia, *Le Roi Albert* (Bruxelles: Editions L'Avenir, 1938), 77–79; 'Le roi se rend en avion au camp d'Elsenborn', *La Meuse*, 5 May 1920.

¹⁰⁹ Rapport, ii, 11.

¹¹⁰ Baltia, *Le Roi Albert*, 81.

¹¹¹ In memory of the king's three visits, a beech tree was planted in the gardens that graced the grounds of the Hotel du Gouvernement in Malmedy. *Ibid*, 87.

house of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, the king confided to Baltia that 'in my household we never speak this [German] language'. As a consequence, Albert feared leaving a bad impression on the German-speaking inhabitants of the territory. He told Baltia, 'I would be very embarrassed if, in Eupen for example, I was obliged to respond in German to a conversation that someone had with me'. Fortunately for the king, Queen Elisabeth spoke fluent German.¹¹²

While the king lavished praise on the efforts made by those loyal to Belgium during the war, the war veterans from Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith who had fought under the flag of the Reich were shown considerable respect by the provisional government. Almost immediately from 1920 they benefited from a reduction of 75% on railway journeys, a highly important development when one considers that the railway line performed a number of invaluable functions in such a rural setting. Although essential in terms of the economy, the railway also connected families and communities with one another. This was especially so for families of war veterans, many of whom lived in Germany. Although the reduction only applied within the territory of the newly controlled districts, it went a long way to easing the financial and logistical burden of getting to visit one's relatives. Injured veterans could also avail of special travel arrangements if they needed to receive medical treatment in either Belgium or the Rhineland. In keeping with an agreement made between the Belgian and German authorities, injured war veterans would be examined by a Belgian–German medical commission in Malmedy, and following certification they were then treated in the same manner as Belgian war veterans.¹¹³ Parents of the fallen could also avail of the opportunity to visit a loved one's burial place, with one trip per year paid for by the government. The return to Eupen of the bodies of dead combatants, who had perished in the war but had been buried in Belgium or France, had already begun.¹¹⁴ While such developments put a very human and empathetic face on the project of 'Belgicization', Baltia could not ignore the counter-effect which Germanization posed to such initiatives, the most formidable agents of which were the local

¹¹²Baltia, *Le Roi Albert*, 97.

¹¹³Rapport sur l'activité, i, 146.

¹¹⁴Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 103.

pro-German clergy, who continued to wield considerable influence across the region. It was evident from the earliest days of the regime that these irredentist disciples would prove the most difficult to convert towards Belgium.

A CURIOUS CONVERSION: THE TRANSFER OF EUPEN-MALMEDY TO THE BISHOPRIC OF LIÈGE

The vast majority of the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy were Catholic.¹¹⁵ However, the territory contained a small community of Lutherans. The decree of 20 January 1920 issued by Baltia maintained Prussian legislation in matters of religious denominations, until such time as the definitive transfer of the districts to Belgium.¹¹⁶ Prior to the rise of the nation state in the nineteenth century, the two most potent referents whereby people could identify themselves against the *Other* were rooted in either local or religious affiliation. During this time, it was not unusual for diocesan borders to permeate state ones.¹¹⁷ However, with the increasing power and prestige attributed to the nation state, national identity subordinated both of these indicators, and thus the conflation of diocesan borders with those of the state became practicable in terms of the advantages presented to both church and state authorities. In any event, the existence of state borders within a diocese posed numerous complications in terms of administration, not least in the appointment of clerics and in the area of financial administration. Furthermore, from the state's perspective, governments became increasingly less tolerant of foreign clerics operating within the borders of the state. Until the turn of the nineteenth century, Eupen, St. Vith and Aachen were tied to the archbishopric of Liège, while Malmedy was administered ecclesiastically from Cologne. In 1801 following Napoleon I's intervention,

¹¹⁵The only remaining Protestant cleric declared in favour of Germany in September 1922 and left the territory. He was eventually replaced by a Belgian cleric. Rapport sur l'activité, iii, 80.

¹¹⁶Rapport sur l'activité, i, 3–5.

¹¹⁷Hubert Jenniges, Traditionelles Kirchenleben und neue Religiosität: vom Einfluss der Kirche auf die Identitätsfindung der deutschen Sprachminderheit in Belgien, in *Kolloquium über Kirchengeschichte und religiöses Leben bei den deutschen Bevölkerungsgruppen im Ausland* (Flensburg: Institut für Regionale Forschung und Information, 1993), 157–171.

Pope Pius VII transferred responsibility for the districts of Eupen and Malmedy along with St. Vith to the archbishopric of Liège. This led to the abolition of the archbishopric of Cologne, while most of its remaining territory was absorbed into the newly created Aachen diocese.¹¹⁸ Following Napoleon's defeat, in 1815 the Congress of Vienna re-established the archbishopric of Cologne, placing Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith under its auspices.¹¹⁹ The conditional surrender of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium a century later by the Treaty of Versailles would once again have consequences for the ecclesiastical administration of both districts. This had already been anticipated by Cardinal Felix von Hartmann of Cologne in May 1919 when, in a strongly worded letter to the Armistice Commission meeting in Spa, he called for a secret popular vote so as to prevent what he described as 'the unjust rape of the population'.¹²⁰

Until the outcome of the popular consultation became known, the position of the districts within Belgium remained provisional. Therefore, a hasty transfer of ecclesiastical authority could not be countenanced by Rome. Shortly after the establishment of the transitory regime in January 1920, the Church authorities in Rome nominated the apostolic nuncio in Brussels, Archbishop Sebastiano Nicotra, as apostolic administrator for Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith. His tenure as apostolic administrator coincided with the duration of the popular consultation. Nicotra's role was to be impartial. Nicotra acted as an intermediary between the archbishop of Cologne and the local clergy in the districts, conferring with Cologne on a regular basis.¹²¹ The local clergy seemed rather indifferent to the papal nuncio's appointment, and continued to look to Cologne as their administrative referent. When Nicotra arrived in Malmedy in the company of Monsignor Bovens, the Vicar General of Liège, he was treated as a dignitary but not as the clerical authority in the region. Nicotra was well aware of the tightrope that he would have to walk between the wishes of the pro-German clergy on the one hand, and the expectations of the Belgian government on the other. In fact, for the

¹¹⁸Klaus Pabst, *Zwischenspiel: Das Bistum Eupen und Malmedy, 1921–1925*, in Philipp Boonen, *Lebensraum Bistum Aachen: Tradition, Aktualität, Zukunft* (Aachen: Einhard-Verlag, 1982), 26–67.

¹¹⁹Pabst, *Zwischenspiel*, 29–30.

¹²⁰*Ibid.* 30–31; *Kölnischer Zeitung*, 26 May 1919.

¹²¹Pabst, *Zwischenspiel*, 35.

majority of the clergy no administrative change was evident, and judging from the correspondence between Cardinal Hartmann in Cologne, it seems that he was of the understanding that the papal nuncio would remain under his control. He told one local curate that '[t]he most reverend Papal Nuncio will make ecclesiastical decisions in constant contact and agreement with me, not in place of me'.¹²² This assurance helped to calm matters to some degree. Nicotra knew the formidable character of Cardinal von Hartmann, whose political preferences were beyond doubt. A devoted supporter of the Kaiser, he had also participated in the conclave of 1914 which had elected Pope Benedict XV. However, Hartmann was already quite ill, having suffered a brain haemorrhage. His death on the first anniversary of the armistice was a body blow to the pro-German campaign in Eupen-Malmedy. Hartmann was succeeded as Archbishop of Cologne by Karl Joseph Schulte. The new incumbent would continue to defend the position of the pro-German clergy in Eupen-Malmedy and the link with Cologne with as much vigour as his predecessor. The Belgian government, on the other hand, was anxious to see the ecclesiastical administration of the districts fall under the auspices of a Belgian bishop.¹²³

During this time, Baltia made efforts to 'counterbalance' the pro-German clergy's influence by utilizing the services of the military chaplain to the Belgian army in Eupen-Malmedy, R.P. de Groote. Baltia impressed upon de Groote to engage with the locals, especially ex-combatants, and to gain their confidence. He had come to know and respect de Groote during his time on the Yser front in the war. Yet in spite of de Groote's 'apostolic zeal', the chaplain's efforts were no match for his German counterparts who continued to benefit from the authority of Cologne's Archbishop Schulte. Baltia would have to find other ways of bringing some of these troublesome clerics on side.¹²⁴

Malmedy in particular was a district well catered for in terms of religious representatives. The fifteen parishes that fell within the confines of the district were served by seventeen curates, and two more taught in the local schools. Under the Belgian system, control of the budget for the

¹²²Archives Paroissiales de Malmedy (APM), A/3.8, Cardinal Felix von Hartmann to Curé Tolhausen of Kettendis and Eupen, 4 December 1919.

¹²³Pabst, *Zwischenspiel*, 33.

¹²⁴Rapport sur l'activité, i, 65.

payment of clerics was the responsibility of the minister for justice. The cost of living in Belgium, however, was considerably higher than that which pertained in the cantons. In addition, the salaries earned by clerics in Belgium were also much less than those of teachers and public service functionaries in general. For the duration of the transitory regime, clerics were to be paid out of the budget of the Eupen-Malmedy government, allowing Baltia some discretion in terms of salary levels. Thus, Baltia saw an opportunity to appeal to the pecuniary passions of the clergy. 'It is known', he wrote to the prime minister, 'that priests much like other mortals are sensitive to the question of money. We hope then if not to incline them towards us, then at least to dilute their hostility.' Hence, a rather generous payments schedule was put in place, which was widely welcomed by the majority of curates.¹²⁵ Not all clerics were so easily swayed, however.

A meeting of priests held in Bütgenbach in March 1920, which had been identified by the authorities as a dissident stronghold, centred on the likelihood of 'an eventual separation from the diocese of Cologne', a development which those in attendance were anxious to prevent. These include the curates Jules Scheffen and Clément Beckman from Malmedy, as well as a dozen other clerics from across the district. At that time, the popular consultation was still under way. Concerns were expressed as to whether or not curates would be forced to resign their posts if the public expression of opinion went Belgium's way. The decision by the Eupen-Malmedy government to end school inspections by members of the clergy was also discussed, a development which was seen as undermining their pastoral role. The role of the recently appointed apostolic administrator was also under consideration, and it was confirmed that the nuncio remained answerable to the Archbishop of Cologne.¹²⁶ However, nobody was really quite so sure just how this ecclesiastical ersatz operated. Even Baltia confessed to being more than a little confused about the hierarchy of authority between Nicotra and Cologne.¹²⁷

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Marjorie Delbarre, *Malmedy à l'heure de la nouvelle Belgique, Particularismes linguistiques, politiques et religieux: Le clergé comme facteur d'intégration, 1919-1925* (Mémoire de licence, Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve, Bruxelles, 2001) [Unpublished], 77-78.

¹²⁷Rapport sur l'activité, i, 65-67.

Once Eupen-Malmedy's annexation by Belgium became definitive in September 1920, the Archbishop of Liège was empowered to appoint priests of his choosing to serve his congregation. Yet even still, the local nexus of curates had not, it appeared, received any notification from Cologne of the new dispensation and so did not recognize any authority other than that coming from Germany.¹²⁸ On Sunday 10 October 1920, during a sermon at the local church in Elsenborn, the curate of the village read a letter sent by the Archbishop of Cologne to the assembled congregation. The general gist of the letter informed the faithful about the existence of an organization for German Catholic youths across the border in the Rhineland. The curate then invited the youths of the village to set up a similar organization, which would become affiliated to the 'Der Katholische Wächter de Rheinlands', and later to the rest of Germany. This kind of dogmatic campaigning in a Catholic cassock was a cause of much concern to Baltia's administration.¹²⁹ Whether fomenting anti-Belgian propaganda during the popular consultation, or attempting to take advantage of the exchange of marks, Baltia was furious that a clergy whose salaries were paid from the government's budget would dare to defy his authority.¹³⁰

The papal nuncio was already busy pleading with local deacons to refrain from doing anything that might strain relations between the clergy and the Belgian authorities. In a letter circulated to all the parishes in the region, he cautioned that it was 'the duty' of the local clergy 'not to obstruct the observance of religious feasts, which were obligatory in Belgium'. He asked the deacons to ensure that their curates 'keep themselves outside of politics', and not to incite the inhabitants 'to anti-Belgian agitation which would ruin the appeasement and tranquillity of which the inhabitants have such need'.¹³¹ At the same time, priests from 'old Belgium' travelled across the border to preach and hear confessions in Malmedy.¹³² Nevertheless, Baltia remained suspicious of a considerable number of the local clergy. Curates such as Clément Beckmann, for

¹²⁸Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 6.

¹²⁹AAEB, 10.792/III, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport du commandant de gendarmerie d'Elsenborn [no date].

¹³⁰Delbarre, Malmedy à l'heure de la nouvelle Belgique, 89.

¹³¹Archives Paroissiale de Malmedy, A/3.8, Papal Nuncio Sebastiano Nicotra to Clément Beckmann, 30 November 1920.

¹³²Delbarre, Malmedy à l'heure de la nouvelle Belgique, 79–80.

example, were, Baltia believed, being 'urged by Cologne' to spread anti-Belgian propaganda.¹³³ His second official report to Brussels gives evidence of this:

If one considers that the territory is bordering Germany ... it is self-explanatory that influence from beyond the border can be easily realised, that customs barriers and other [barriers] can do nothing about it; added to this, the influence of the German clergy is still working ... constituting a veritable opposition against the new regime.¹³⁴

The Versailles Treaty stipulated that, following the transfer of sovereignty from Germany to Belgium, all inhabitants of the territory resident there before 1 August 1914 would automatically be endowed with Belgian citizenship. Those who came to the territory after that date would have to apply to the Belgian government for permission to acquire citizenship.¹³⁵ With the assistance of the papal nuncio, Archbishop Schulte made efforts to have German priests in the parishes across all three cantons excluded from this requirement.¹³⁶ Baltia showed that he was willing to compromise on this question, and in a reply to Nicotra in December 1920, he agreed to offer a permit of foreign residency (*permis de séjour d'étranger*) to those priests who demanded it. Although the recipients would not enjoy 'the political rights of Belgians', they could nevertheless continue to administer to their congregations once they did not fall foul of the authorities. This meant desisting from using their pulpits as portals of German propaganda. Nicotra, who now stayed on in his role as apostolic administrator, informed the local clergy that henceforth they would only need to correspond with him in ecclesiastical matters.¹³⁷

As far as Brussels was concerned, it was imperative that the two districts be attached to a Belgian bishopric at the earliest opportunity. The Belgian representative to the Holy See, Count Léo d'Ursel, urged the

¹³³Archives de l'État à Liège (AEL), AEL, Fonds Rutten, 92–95, Baltia to Mgr. Rutten, 29 October 1921.

¹³⁴Rapport sur l'activité, iii, 3.

¹³⁵*The Versailles Treaty*, iii., i.36, 28 June 1919.

¹³⁶W. Kaefler, 'L'attitude du clergé catholique au cours des années 1919–1925' in *Folklore-Stavelot-Malmédy-St. Vith*, XLVI (1982), 69–80 (73).

¹³⁷AEL, Fonds Rutten, 92–95, Baltia to Papal Nuncio Nicotra, 16 December 1920.

Vatican to hurry the preparation of the papal bull confirming this.¹³⁸ However, things did not move quite as swiftly as d'Ursel might have wished. Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier, Belgium's primate and hero of the war, had already indicated to the Belgian Foreign Ministry as early as 3 January 1920 his desire to see Eupen-Malmedy temporarily form a stand-alone diocese with an apostolic vicar at its head. This recommendation by Belgium's primate was repeated in correspondence to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri in Rome, along with the recommendation that all Belgium's dioceses be reorganized in light of its rapidly growing population and changing demographics; Belgium's population having doubled since the inception of the state in 1830.¹³⁹ Belgium's Foreign Minister, Henri Jaspar, on the other hand, was not enamoured by the idea of Eupen-Malmedy as a free-standing diocese, and insisted on its direct incorporation into the existing diocese of Liège, or at least Eupen to Liège and Malmedy to Namur. This latter option was also preferred by Mercier in the event of his first choice being discounted. He did not think it a wise thing to have Eupen-Malmedy incorporated as a single entity into a particular diocese, as it would have been a misrepresentation of the cultural diversity of what were two separate historical districts.

The final decision on the ecclesiastical status of the territory was promulgated by Rome in the papal bull *Ecclesiae universae*, which saw Eupen and Malmedy come under the auspices of the Bishop of Liège, Monsignor Martin Hubert Rutten.¹⁴⁰ The districts would nonetheless form a distinct diocese from that of Liège. As Cardinal Mercier phrased it when writing to Cardinal Gasparri in February, 'The Bishop of Liège will thus be Bishop of Liège and Eupen-Malmedy, as is the case with the Archbishop of Edinburgh in Scotland who is Bishop of Edinburgh and

¹³⁸Aartbisschoppelijk Archief Mechelen (AAM), Mercier Papers, XVI/17, Comte d'Ursel to Cardinal Gasparri, 15 January 1922; Hubert Willems, *Le lent transfert ecclésiastique d'Eupen-Malmedy (1919–1922): Le martyrologe de son clergé (1940–1945)* (Bruxelles, 1989) [Unpublished], 14–5.

¹³⁹AAM, Mercier Papers, XVI/17, Cardinal Mercier to Cardinal Gasparri, 26 January 1921.

¹⁴⁰Christoph Brüll, 'Le diocèse d'Eupen et de Malmedy: quelques considérations sur l'attitude de l'Église face aux 'frères retrouvés' Durant l'Entre-deux-guerres' (première partie), *Bloc Notes*, 35 (June 2013), 13–17.

St Andrews.’¹⁴¹ Although disappointed with the loss of Eupen-Malmedy to the diocese of Liège, Cologne could take some succour from the fact that the districts formed a separate diocese, and that this might facilitate a seamless reintegration in the event that the territories were returned to the Reich.¹⁴²

Following the creation of the diocese of Eupen-Malmedy on 30 July 1921 and the appointment of Monsignor Rutten as Bishop, the number of curates of Belgian origin and of pro-Belgian persuasion began to rise steadily from a situation where not a single curate from Belgium practised in the territory in 1917 to a total of ten by 1924.¹⁴³ Sometimes misunderstandings arose between functionaries of the transitory regime and local clerics. In some instances, these were the result of nothing more than the ignorance of officials concerning the traditional practices and customs in certain communes. The celebrating of a fortnightly mass through German in the cathedral in Malmedy had been a longstanding tradition in the town. When Baltia initially received word of this practice, he wrote to Monsignor Rutten complaining of ‘an abuse which had been practiced in Malmedy for over a year’. He explained how ‘the mass which is celebrated in the cathedral once a fortnight is sung entirely in German’.¹⁴⁴ Monsignor Rutten queried the local abbot, Jules Scheffen, with whom Baltia had had a difficult first encounter following his arrival in Malmedy, as to why this mass continued to be celebrated solely through German. He also informed Scheffen that it was the opinion of the government that he had pro-German leanings. Rutten received a rather uncompromising reply. Scheffen informed the monsignor that the German mass had a history and a tradition in the town which pre-dated his arrival there in 1907. He rejected the accusations of pro-German leanings, adding that ‘I was never a friend of the Germans that is to say that the German authorities never liked me’. Claiming that the German authorities sought his expulsion from Malmedy at the outbreak of the war because he had refused to dispense with using French in his church, Scheffen insisted:

¹⁴¹AAM, Mercier Papers, XVI/17, Cardinal Mercier to Cardinal Gasparri, 26 January 1921.

¹⁴²Brüll, *Le diocèse d'Eupen et de Malmedy*, 17.

¹⁴³Delbarre, *Malmedy à l'heure de la nouvelle Belgique*, 77–80.

¹⁴⁴AEL, Fonds Rutten, 92–95, Baltia to Mgr. Rutten, 16 November 1921.

I was a resolute defender of the language of my fathers; French. I even had a war of words with the highest authorities and only thanks to the Archbishop of Cologne (at the time Felix Hartmann), was I successful.¹⁴⁵

Baltia had misjudged Scheffen from their first meeting. With the passing of time, he acknowledged this fact, recognizing that at the time he had lacked sufficient empathy with the invidious position in which the abbot had found himself. Unlike Baltia and the authorities in Berlin, Scheffen and his co-clerics could not simply operate in terms of national allegiance alone. Hence the old adage that greeted Baltia on many occasions, and which vexed him more often than not: 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's'. This was the doctrine which clerics like Scheffen had to follow in order to navigate the shifting temporal borders of national allegiance.¹⁴⁶ While the project of national allegiance remained the priority for Baltia, it was at the local level that the most important transformation would be evinced. In this way, Baltia looked to the nexus of local government as the coping stone on which the political integration of 'new Belgium' would be built.

'BELGICIZATION' OF THE COMMUNE: THE INTRODUCTION OF BELGIAN COMMUNAL LAW

Gérard Cooreman, Belgium's last prime minister of the Great War, addressing the Universal Exhibition in Ghent in 1913 stated that '[a] man is a citizen of two places: his municipality and his homeland'.¹⁴⁷ Since the country's inception in 1830 up to the present day, local identity in Belgium has taken precedence over that conceived at either regional or national level.¹⁴⁸ In his initial assessment of the political structures in Eupen-Malmedy, Baltia signalled his disappointment at how

¹⁴⁵AEL, Fonds Rutten, 92–95, Scheffen to Mgr. Rutten, 21 November 1921.

¹⁴⁶Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 5–6.

¹⁴⁷Gérard Cooreman addressing *The Universal Exhibition* in Ghent in 1913, cited in William Whyte (intro.), Ghent Planning Congress 1913: *Le premier congrès international et exposition comparée de villes, I: Construction de villes, II: organisation de la vie communale* (London: Routledge, 1914), iii, 71–75.

¹⁴⁸Tony Judt, 'Is there a Belgium?', in Benno Barnard, Martine Van Berlo, Geert Van Istendael, Tony Judt, Marc Reynebeau & Sophie de Schaepdrijver, *How Can One Not Be Interested in Belgium: War, Language and Consensus in Belgium since 1830* (Gent: Academia Press, 2005), 13–32 (15).

the system of local government had been 'considerably neglected' by the German authorities, even allowing for what he described as 'the dogged opposition' demonstrated by a number of inhabitants towards German centralization. In his opinion, the district of Malmedy in particular had been treated 'like an adopted child'. The lack of an election during the war years and the absence of a number of elected officials who had 'disappeared', whether as a result of 'death, defection or resignation', further eroded the administrative infrastructure in the district. In the aftermath of the war, the allied occupation had placed a further layer of regulation and administration on top of that already in place.¹⁴⁹

Under the German regime, the *Kreistag* or county assembly had been the main organ of self-government in Eupen and in Malmedy. Made up of local individuals, it proved an impotent instrument of administration, much like the *Kreisausschuss*, which was an executive consultative committee established to assist the *Landrat* in governing the *Kreis*. Indeed, it was in the hands of the *Landrat* where the real power lay. The *Landrat* was at once the representative of central government and the head of local government in the *Kreis*. He oversaw the implementation of central government policy in the district, while at the same time coordinating the functions of various local officials and services. The *Landrat* also enjoyed sole control of the rural police, and was thus responsible for the maintenance of law and order. He was in effect the only civil individual in the *Kreis* who enjoyed such power.¹⁵⁰ Together, Eupen and Malmedy comprised 54 communes. Both the *Landrat* in Eupen and his counterpart in Malmedy were answerable to the *Regierungspräsident* based in Aachen.¹⁵¹

In January 1920, Baltia issued a decree signalling the dissolution of both the *Kreistag* and the *Kreisausschuss* in both districts, which saw

¹⁴⁹ *Rapport sur l'activité*, i, 160.

¹⁵⁰ Lysbeth W. Muncy, 'The Prussian *Landräte* in the last years of the monarchy: A case study of Pomerania and the Rhineland in 1890–1918', *Central European History*, 6 (4) (December 1973), 299–338 (304).

¹⁵¹ *Eupen-Malmedy et son Gouverneur*, 120–125; Alfred Minke, Des 'frères retrouvés' aux 'Germanophones de Belgique': Une minorité et son évolution, *Cahiers de Cléo* (1992), 69–80 (72); Christoph Brüll, 'Eupen-Malmedy 1918–1945: le temps des déchirures' in *Hommage à Henri Bragard (1877–1944)*, Collection 'Mémoire wallonne' (13) (Liège: Société de Langue et de Littérature wallonnes, 2009), 7–38 (8–10).

them replaced by district deputations (*députations du district*).¹⁵² These six-member committees were to assist the newly appointed district commissioners who had assumed the functions of the *Landräte*.¹⁵³ By dissolving the *Kreistag* and *Kreisausschuss*, Baltia removed two potential incubators of dissent that had the capacity to foment organized and serious opposition to the transformations taking place, whether through incitement on the ground or through their communications with Berlin.¹⁵⁴

Baltia further divided the two districts under the direction of assistant commissioners (*sous-commissariats*). Malmédy, being a much greater expanse of territory than Eupen, was divided between four separate assistant commissioners, while Eupen needed just one. Baltia believed that by decentralizing the office of the district commissioner in this way, 'solid and durable foundations' could be laid where the roots of Belgian legislation could take hold. It also afforded Baltia an insight into the functioning of the various communal departments and services. The assistant commissioners' primary role was to act as 'agents of liaison' between the district commissioner and 'all administrative organisms' under their control.¹⁵⁵ As for those functionaries already employed in the various communal services, the proclamation of 11 January 1920 made clear that employees of the previous state administration whose loyalty to the new

¹⁵²Décret 10, 'Dissolution des Kreistags et des Kreisausschuss'; Décret 11, 'Création d'une commission destinée à remplacer le Kreisausschuss', 31 January 1920, *Recueil des décrets, arrêtes & avis, i, 10 Janvier au 10 Juillet 1920* [hereafter, Recueil, i] (Stavelot, 1920), 18–19.

¹⁵³*Eupen-Malmédy et son gouverneur*, 120–125; 'Décret no. 193, Plaçant l'administration des villes de Malmédy et de St. Vith sous la dépendance du commissaire du district de Malmédy', 5 February 1921, *Recueil des décrets, arrêtes & avis, iii, 11 Janvier–1 Juillet 1921* [hereafter, Recueil, iii], 45.

¹⁵⁴Décret no. 204, Attribuant au Commissaire du District d'Eupen les prérogatives du Regierungspräsident, *Recueil des décrets, arrêtes & avis, iii, 11 Juillet–10 Juillet 1921* [hereafter, Recueil, ii], p. 57.

¹⁵⁵Correspondence between the assistant commissioners and Governor Baltia's office, as well as communications with other administrations, whether of the Belgian state or of the previous regime, had to be conducted via the office of the district commissioner. SAE, Nachlass Baltia, Rapport sur l'activité, i, 168 & 192.

regime was not in doubt could remain at their posts.¹⁵⁶ The mandates of the local councillors elected under the German system had effectively expired on 31 December 1919. Faced with the impending popular consultation in the early months of the regime, the outcome of which as yet remained uncertain, Baltia decided to extend the mandates of the communal administrations for another year.

The Eupen-Malmedy government also committed itself, at least in the short term, to filling any gaps in the administrative framework, that might have arisen for whatever reason, whether following the death of a local representative, or in the event of his resignation. Furthermore, where certain communal bodies were deemed to be lacking either in terms of their efficiency or capabilities, Baltia reserved the right to use 'exceptional measures' to rectify the situation both in terms of financial resources and manpower.¹⁵⁷ A further extension of the councillors' mandates was announced in November 1920, the application of which was to facilitate what was hoped would be a seamless transfer from the old model of local government to the new, with the expected holding of local elections by the spring of 1922.¹⁵⁸ Baltia deemed the extension necessary, and argued that it would otherwise have been 'impossible to proceed with the elections during the transitory period'. After all, he argued that the Eupen-Malmedy government could not afford to allow a vacuum to be created which 'would inevitably lead to occasions of political manifestation'. In this way, Baltia recognized the importance of locally cultivated and legitimate governance, but with a Belgian character. In the meantime, a firm hand was required to steer clear of any obstacles which threatened to either complicate or delay the holding of communal elections under a Belgian flag.¹⁵⁹

Be that as it may, in March 1920 all sitting burgomasters were dismissed, with only Léopold Villers being retained as the burgomaster of Malmedy, and Bartholomew Jacob in Hergenrath and Hauset.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶'Proclamation, 11 January 1920', *Recueil*, i, 1–4.

¹⁵⁷'Décret, prorogeant les pouvoirs des conseils communaux', 23 January 1920, *Recueil*, i, 14–15.

¹⁵⁸'Décret prorogeant les pouvoirs des conseils communaux du Gouvernement Eupen-Malmedy', 11 November 1920, *Recueil*, ii, .101–102; JOME, 25 March 1922.

¹⁵⁹SAE, Nachlass Baltia, C.3.3.III.191, Rapport sur l'activité, i, 164.

¹⁶⁰Décret no. 28, 'Démission et nomination des bourgmestres dans les districts d'Eupen et de Malmédy. Institutions des commissariats et des sous-commissariats de districts. Attributions et nomination des titulaires', 10 March 1920, *Recueil*, i, 48–50.

A number of temporary burgomasters were then appointed for an indefinite period, with certain restrictions placed on their powers. The reason for this clear-out was underlined in Baltia's first report to the prime minister early in 1920, when he noted 'the importance of breaking the lines of fidelity which tied the primary functionaries of the communes to the German administration'.¹⁶¹ Baltia recognized the threat posed to his administration by those within the communal councils of a pro-German persuasion. Hence, in November 1920 a decree was issued making it compulsory for any prospective burgomasters or other public officials, in keeping with Article 61 of Belgian Communal Law, to swear an oath of allegiance to the Belgian state in advance of assuming office.¹⁶²

In Eupen, Graf von Metternich, one of those temporary burgomasters appointed in March, refused to swear the oath. Von Metternich had formed part of the welcome committee that had greeted Baltia on his arrival in Eupen in January 1920, but at that stage he, like the vast majority of the inhabitants, was convinced that a full annexation by Belgium was as unlikely as it was unwelcome. The void created by von Metternich's dismissal was temporarily filled by the *échevin* (alderman) Luchem, who acted in a caretaker position for two months, after which time a new burgomaster would have to be appointed. Luchem was duly summoned to Baltia's headquarters, where it was demanded that he ask the council in Eupen to propose a replacement for von Metternich. In keeping with German law (which was still in force locally), the government could refuse a candidate's proposal on two occasions, following which it would then propose its own candidate. Unsurprisingly, the council unanimously nominated Luchem. However, Baltia refused to endorse the nomination, the chief concern being the fear that Luchem was sympathetic to Germany. In any case, he was deemed too old for the post, and not of the calibre required to facilitate the changes to come.

Following the rejection of Luchem's nomination by the Eupen-Malmedy government, the onus fell on Eupen's councillors to submit a new nomination. The councillors arranged matters so that a sufficient quorum could not be realized and so, instead of deliberating a third time, the council demanded that their concerns be addressed in Malmedy,

¹⁶¹Rapport sur l'activité, i, 165.

¹⁶²Application de l'article 61 de la loi communale, prestation de serment des bourgmestres et conseillers communaux, 16 November 1920, *Recueil*, ii, 110.

and insisted on an audience with the government. This was refused, and the council was given just four more days to decide on a new nominee. When the four days had elapsed, Baltia put forward his own nominee, the assistant commissioner of Eupen, Jules de Grand Ry. The de Grand Ry name was well established in Eupen over many decades. The family's allegiance was very much towards Belgium. In order for de Grand Ry to be installed, however, a sufficient number of councillors needed to be present. On the day of de Grand Ry's expected installation as Eupen's new burgomaster, the majority of the councillors gathered in a nearby café in protest at what they saw as the dictatorial and uncompromising position adopted by Baltia. In response to such barefaced opposition, Baltia issued a *décret* reducing the number of councillors from 24 to 12. The governor thus regarded the councillors who had absented themselves as having resigned, and Jules de Grand Ry was duly elected burgomaster of Eupen. The affair ended there, at least in terms of the immediate political wrangle. However, Baltia was now determined to have 'a local government armed with sufficient powers to suppress any such attempted obstructions' in the future. On the other hand, the episode served to fuel further resentment towards the transitory regime. Baltia later reinforced the measure through a decree in December.¹⁶³

A seminal step on the path to full implementation of Belgian communal law was the *décret* of 13 October 1921. In spite of this development, all decisions taken at town-council level still needed Baltia's approval. Although the number of communes had been reduced from 54 to 30, 17 new communes were created from the merger or division of existing communes. The creation of these new communes necessitated the nomination of seventeen new burgomasters by the district commissioners, ahead of the communal elections, and their endorsement by Baltia.¹⁶⁴ Having navigated between German and Belgian legislation in the area of local government since the autumn of 1920, the decree of 13 October 1921 expunged German legislation from the three districts. The *décret* took effect from 1 January 1922, albeit with some qualifications in respect of the transitory political status of the territory. These qualifications included the dissolution of the communal councils and their

¹⁶³Rapport sur l'activité, ii, 8–9.

¹⁶⁴Décret, no. 232, 'Décret sur la loi communale', 6 April 1921, *Recueil*, iii, 98.

replacement by *notables* chosen by Baltia, whose function it was to fill the political void until the holding of communal elections in May.¹⁶⁵

Looking to the future, Baltia was of the opinion that only Eupen-Malmedy should be incorporated into the province of Liège, while St. Vith should ideally be attached to the province of Luxembourg to the south, the inhabitants of St. Vith having much in common culturally and historically with the cantons of Vielsalm and Bastogne.¹⁶⁶ Baltia paid a visit to Belgium's foreign minister, Paul Hymans, and articulated his reasoning for the division of the districts in the post-Baltia period. While Hymans endorsed Baltia's recommendation, the Liberal representatives in the *arrondissement* of Bastogne refused to cooperate. Senator Herbert Speyer was concerned about the consolidation of the Catholic Party's vote in Bastogne. Nevertheless, Hymans ensured that for now, at least, Baltia's recommendation would be honoured.¹⁶⁷

By early 1922, the transition process was well advanced, at least politically. In keeping with the procedure in place throughout Belgium, these first local elections under a Belgian flag would operate a list system. However, no electoral registers suitable for the new dispensation existed. These had to be created using census information from 1921, as well as information relating to the files on identity cards.¹⁶⁸ In the meantime, he recommended the division of the electorate between registers in the Belgian provinces of Luxembourg and Liège registers so as to better prepare the population for the definitive incorporation. Baltia was surprised to learn that the electoral registers in the Belgian province of Luxembourg were not compiled in the same manner as those in Liège. To help with the organization of lists in Luxembourg, the former district commissioner of Eupen-Malmedy, Schnorrenberg, was appointed to the post of commissioner for the *arrondissement* of Bastogne, to act as a link between the Eupen-Malmedy government and the provincial government of Luxembourg.¹⁶⁹ The elections had originally been set to take place on 23

¹⁶⁵Rapport sur l'activité, i, 154–156.

¹⁶⁶A number of communes of St. Vith shared a similar patois with that found in the province of Luxembourg and in some of the communes of Bastogne and Vielsalm.

¹⁶⁷Erinnerungen, Herrebut, *Memoiren*, 46–47; Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 327–328.

¹⁶⁸Rapport sur l'activité, iii, 60.

¹⁶⁹Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 327.

April, but they were put back until Sunday 21 May to accommodate the registration process.¹⁷⁰

The electoral lists varied only slightly between the three districts in terms of candidate numbers. Nine communal councils were to be elected in Eupen, ten in Malmedy and eleven in St. Vith. In all, 270 council seats had to be filled and some 61 aldermen elected. Each council could elect two aldermen except for Eupen, which had three. Eupen was the only one of the thirty communes where the Catholic list was successful, taking seven out of the thirteen seats available. The socialist list took one, while a 'communal interest' list filled the five remaining vacancies. In terms of the wider district, a total of 34 seats were split between candidates of diverse interests or individuals not aligned to any party. Twenty-two seats were filled by candidates on 'communal interest' lists, whilst four dissident candidates were also elected. Of the 90 seats contested in Malmedy, most again fell to candidates of diverse interests and the majority of these were elected unopposed. In St. Vith, it was the non-party candidates who again took the greatest share of seats (46 out of 97), including three candidates who were part of a 'Worker's List without political affiliation'. This rather fragmented outcome was evidence of the cautious approach adopted by an electorate as yet unsure of how to navigate through a political landscape in flux. That said, in what were after all communal elections, it is hardly surprising that local issues would have been to the fore. Moreover, this was a populace exhausted by war and overwhelmed by the political repercussions of its aftermath. Many, even among those who had begun to accept the fait accompli of Belgian sovereignty, remained cautious about the domestic political repercussions to follow. Be that as it may, almost all the candidates who had stood with the backing of the Eupen-Malmedy government were successful in the election. Of the 17 burgomasters nominated by Baltia, 14 were elected. However, he was not taking this success for granted. The number of independent candidates and dissident councillors elected worried the governor to the extent that, in correspondence to the Interior Ministry he observed that 'these elections show how the territory of Eupen-Malmedy had not ceased to serve as terrain for anti-Belgian propaganda'.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ *La Semaine*, 18 March 1922.

¹⁷¹ Rapport sur l'activité, iii, 78.

Once the elections had ended, the various councils were invited to elect their aldermen, and together with the *collèges échevinaux* to nominate their respective burgomasters. Numerous pamphlets were circulated explaining to councillors the implications of the transformations taking place. In spite of this, certain communal administrations were slow to adapt to the new situation. For example, the submission of budgets was delayed in a number of communes. In some cases, this was due to a lack of will on the part of the councillors. In others, it was down to the ignorance of newly elected officials about the new procedures and protocols. In order to address these problems, measures were put in place where inspectors appointed by the Eupen-Malmedy government would periodically visit council offices and sit in on council meetings, to observe how the proceedings were conducted and advise where necessary changes would have to be made. Furthermore, councils were 'invited' to provide minutes of their meetings with the aim of ensuring that all the decisions had been taken in adherence to the law. The minutes were then sent to the *députation permanente* to be assessed. In essence, such measures were intended to control dissident elements in the councils that threatened to undermine the advances being made. Even those councillors elected on the socialist lists had the potential to be a thorn in the side of the transitory regime, not least since the POB continued to argue for a new and secret plebiscite to determine the future status of the contested territory. While emphasizing that his government still had 'a role of education and surveillance to exercise', neither Baltia nor Brussels could ignore these uncomfortable truths.¹⁷²

TWILIGHT OF TRANSITION: CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES ON BALTIA'S REGIME

Measuring the mood of the population during this time is difficult against the backdrop of press censorship and the fact that the people of Eupen-Malmedy lived under a state of exception. However, the national and international press had no such restrictions on what it could report. When a correspondent from the Belgian journal *Le Neptune* visited the two districts in December 1921 sampling public attitudes to Baltia's

¹⁷²Rapport sur l'activité, iii, 65–66.

government, it painted a rather grim picture of how the provisional government was perceived. The chief criticism dominating the article was that the regime seemed, if anything, to be incompetent, something which was most probably far more damaging to Baltia's prestige than any of the previous allegations of heavy-handedness and duplicity levelled at him during the public expression of opinion. Whilst crediting Baltia with 'probably' being 'a very good general' and a 'perfect gentleman', the journal concluded that 'he makes a poor administrator'.¹⁷³ His *aide de camp*, it was noted, was his brother-in-law, who was also a captain of the cavalry, and was financed from the purse of the cabinet. Another brother-in-law controlled the operation of the press which published the *Journal Officiel-Amtsblatt* for Eupen-Malmedy.¹⁷⁴ Baltia's apparent penchant for creating and providing positions for members of his family was viewed by his growing band of detractors from within the Belgian body *politik* as a worrying development, not least in light of the 'exorbitant salaries, privileges and conditions from which they benefited'. The cost of maintaining the other members of his administration was judged to be equally excessive, and all the more so once juxtaposed against the dire financial situation in which the Belgian state found itself. Baltia's secretary general, Pierre Van Werveke, at just 29 years of age, was thought to be too inexperienced to deal with the myriad of complex issues facing the administration. Furthermore, he was deemed too costly for such a position. His basic salary was 24,000 francs, but he also earned a further 10,000 francs as a member of the Transfer Commission. The superior consultative committee (*conseil supérieur*) was, it seemed, only convened after a decision had already been made by the governor. Therefore, it was little more than a front for cronyism. This further fuelled the perception that the transitory regime was far from democratic, and was instead a micro-dictatorship.

A Dutch reporter who came to Eupen-Malmedy in August 1922 interviewed a number of officials and dignitaries as well as inhabitants from both districts. A translated version of his interviews appeared in the Belgian newspaper *L'Express*. One of his first encounters was with the burgomaster Steisel of Malmedy, a rabid pro-Belgian and one who

¹⁷³LANRW, Regierung Aachen Präsidialbüro und Sondergruppen, 1652/6822/14, [microfilm], *Le Neptune*, 5 December 1921.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

had previously served as a councillor (Stadtrat) under the German Empire. Both his father and grandfather had fought under the flag of the Reich in the Great War. Steisel was now quite happy with his new-found political status and confidently optimistic for the future. Baltia also willingly offered his assessment of the situation in the districts to the Dutch journalist. Acknowledging that at the nascent stage of his regime barely 5% of the population would have willingly embraced Belgian sovereignty, and that the majority of inhabitants, even among the Walloon minority, were at the time inclined towards Germany, he noted that '[n]ow almost everyone takes off their hat when the *Brabançonne* is played'. The general mood in Malmedy was described in the article as being somewhere between resignation to the *fait accompli* of Belgian sovereignty and contentment with the degree of stability offered under the Eupen-Malmedy government. As one man put it, 'We have lost the war and must conform to our situation.'¹⁷⁵ When the journalist visited Eupen, however, he encountered a markedly different reaction. Here, an overwhelming sense of resignation to a *fait accompli*, engineered above the heads of the inhabitants, and against the will of the people, coloured the responses received. One Eupen resident attempted to explain his dilemma by asking:

Why remain German? If we opt for our former homeland we will have to leave the place of our birth where we have always been happy, where almost all of us have our own home, to search out an uncertain future in a failed Germany!¹⁷⁶

By the summer of 1922, Germany was in a state of crisis, politically and economically. Matthias Erzberger, the former vice-Chancellor, had been assassinated just days before the arrival of the Dutch journalist in Eupen-Malmedy, while in June Germany's foreign minister, Walter Rathenau, was assassinated some months after signing the Rapallo Treaty with the USSR, which reversed the territorial and financial stipulations of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918. By now, the German economy was in free fall as an unrelenting spiral of hyperinflation saw the mark plummet to

¹⁷⁵'Un gros sujet d'inquiétude' in *L'Express*, 29 August 1922.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

unprecedented lows.¹⁷⁷ It is little wonder then that a certain segment of the population in Eupen-Malmedy began to focus on their individual and immediate circumstances, and in return for losing their German citizenship, could keep their home and family together. Thus, becoming Belgian was, for many, the lesser of two evils.

When Baltia appeared before the Belgian cabinet in June 1922 to report on the latest phase of the transition, he was able to point to a series of successes under his administration. The definitive transfer of the districts to Belgium following the successful outcome of the public expression of opinion had been achieved, and the implementation of Belgian communal law in the districts and the gradual synthesis of commercial and penal law with that of the Belgian state had also been completed.¹⁷⁸ Baltia informed the cabinet how 'all of the Prussian functionaries were dismissed' and that 'those who originated from the attached regions had kept in their jobs, and one has had no reason to complain of their service'. However, to help the government of Malmedy to function more effectively, Baltia appealed for the assistance of more Belgians with a good knowledge of German.¹⁷⁹ Over half of the clergy were still German, and this more than any other form of street or state-driven propaganda was a threat to the project of assimilation. Those priests who had refused Belgian nationality needed to be replaced. However, filling the void caused by their departure would pose a new problem, as there were not enough Belgian priests sufficiently proficient in German.

Baltia insisted that great efforts still needed to be made to ease the people of Eupen-Malmedy into Belgian political life. He estimated that while full political and administrative incorporation would not be possible before the end of 1924, complete assimilation would not be possible before a period of some thirty years had elapsed. In this light, Baltia believed that the formulation of the law to end the 'regime of exception' would need to be cognisant of this. He set about preparing the law to end the transitory administration, which he believed ought to have been prepared by the Belgian parliament. However, he regretted that

¹⁷⁷ Anthony McElligott, *Rethinking the Weimar Republic: Authority and Authoritarianism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 71–73.

¹⁷⁸ *La Gazette*, 16 June 1922; *Indépendance Belge*, 13 June 1922.

¹⁷⁹ AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 12 June 1922.

nobody in the Belgian government was familiar with the German laws that would underpin such legislation, and in addition they displayed little understanding of the process followed by his government to date.¹⁸⁰ In his memoirs, Baltia claims to have begged the cabinet to decide on a definite date for the implementation of the law to terminate the transitory regime; however, no decision was forthcoming. Baltia ended his meeting with the cabinet by promising to place a draft of the termination law before parliament by the autumn of 1924.

In spite of the provisional government's apparent successes, and the fact that legislation framing the termination of the regime had already begun to be formulated, calls for the regime to be wound down began to mount. Voices from inside the Belgian parliament were critical of Baltia's decision to reserve the right to appoint *notables* of his own choosing over the heads of the electorate. The *chef de service* for education, Léon Mallinger, was also the subject of much criticism, not least for his decision to sack as many as twelve teaching staff in one year alone.¹⁸¹ In response to questions from a growing number of Belgian senators on curbing some of the reported excesses of Baltia's administration, the Belgian Interior Minister Paul Berryer claimed to have no power to do so. The liberal senator Herbert Speyer thought it incredible that a power operated in 'those territories' in the name of Belgium for which no government minister was responsible.¹⁸² Baltia, in his memoirs, charges that Speyer was motivated for other reasons, not least Baltia's recommendation that St. Vith, with its politically traditional Catholic population, be incorporated separately into the *arrondissement* of Bastogne, for which Speyer was a representative. Berryer responded to criticism of Baltia by reminding senators that they needed to refamiliarize themselves with the facts. When the parliament created the transitory regime in the cantons, no provision had been made for a right of appeal against laws and decrees enacted by the high commissioner. He reminded his critics that Baltia's mission in the cantons could only be terminated following a vote by parliament. At that moment, the socialist deputy Marius Renard

¹⁸⁰Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 41.

¹⁸¹APB, Albert Renard, *Sénat*, 16 January 1923; *La Nation Belge*, 21 March 1923.

¹⁸²Herbert Speyer was Liberal senator for Arlon-Mache-Bastogne-Neufchâteau-Virton (1912–1925). Hubert Willems, *Le ministre libérale Albert Devèze (1881–1959) et Eupen–Malmedy–St. Vith: l'amour sacré de la patrie* (1989) [Unpublished], 10; APB, *Sénat*, 16 January 1923.

interjected that 'General Baltia lacks tact', while other voices from the socialist benches demanded that he be recalled.¹⁸³ Berryer was satisfied that 'Baltia admirably accomplished the mission with which he had been charged', to which another deputy exclaimed, 'You're making excuses for the dictator.'¹⁸⁴

Ostensibly, Baltia's administration was to have been a bridge between the law-abiding subjects of Eupen-Malmedy and their king. However, for a considerable number of inhabitants, it seemed that it had instead become an obstacle to the very process of assimilation. Not only did it seem an unnecessary expense, which was a drain on the coffers of the Belgian state and on the taxpayers of Eupen-Malmedy, but it was also seen as preventing those inhabitants who sought the ear of the Brussels government, from having their voices heard. A serious worry, particularly among the Left, was the association being made between Baltia's government and the recently installed fascist regime under Benito Mussolini in Italy. Herbert Speyer wondered about the real value of Baltia's regime, in light of 'these times of Fascism and *Mussolinisme*, [sic] where under the pretext of defending the social order one sees the most extravagant and revolutionary theses being supported by the so called men of order'. The reality, he argued, was that Baltia could 'commit some of the most grave excesses with impunity'.¹⁸⁵ Another senator, Albert Renard, the socialist representative for Spa, insisted that it was time for Baltia's regime to be terminated, and for Eupen and Malmedy to be fully incorporated into the Belgian state 'as soon as possible and in the most absolute manner, taking account of the complexity of the question [...] the difficulties being encountered by the administration and the discontent which it provokes'.¹⁸⁶

Berryer could not ignore the lack of support in parliament for a continuation of the regime. In 1923, Baltia was suddenly invited to take over as commander of the Belgian Army of Occupation in the Rhineland. In October, he was fêted by the people of Malmedy (an event organized by Van Werveke). King Albert wrote a special letter of thanks congratulating Baltia on 'enabling the people of Eupen-Malmedy

¹⁸³'Le Général Baltia a manqué de doigté', *La Libre Belgique*, 18 January 1923.

¹⁸⁴APB, *Sénat*, 16 January 1923, 280. Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 292; Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 105.

¹⁸⁵APB, *Sénat*, 25 January 1923, 349–358.

¹⁸⁶*Le Peuple*, 18 January 1923.

to adapt to the new regime, resulting in their return to Belgium'.¹⁸⁷ Berryer immediately sought to prepare the way for the disestablishment of the Eupen-Malmedy government by 1 January 1924 but, realizing that such a deadline could not be met, he advised the cabinet in November 1923 that in the interim Baltia was to combine his new role with that of governor of Eupen-Malmedy.¹⁸⁸ However, a few weeks later, the cabinet learned that Baltia had changed his mind and would now be staying in Malmedy.¹⁸⁹

Following the collapse of Prime Minister George Theunis' Catholic-Liberal coalition government in February 1924, Berryer was replaced as interior minister by Prosper Poulet.¹⁹⁰ Unlike Berryer, Poulet was anxious for a rapid termination of the transitory regime. Not everyone in the government saw merit in this development, however. Defence Minister Pierre Forthomme, a Liberal, was in no hurry to see the regime terminated.¹⁹¹ He advised his colleagues against being too hasty with the definitive reattachment of the territories. Forthomme's primary concern, however, and that of his party was the effect which the incorporation of 'new Belgium' would have on the Liberal vote in the coming legislative elections. Poulet, a member of the Catholic Party, did not share Forthomme's fears and argued that for the government not to allow the inhabitants to participate in the forthcoming elections would more likely 'hurt them and greatly encourage elements opposed to Belgium'. In April, Poulet promised to submit the bill on the definitive reattachment of the cantons at the next cabinet meeting.¹⁹² Much of the drafting

¹⁸⁷King Albert I to Baltia, cited in *La Nation Belge*, 29 October. 1929; 'L'oeuvre de Baltia' *Le Soir*, 25 October 1929.

¹⁸⁸The idea was that Baltia would be represented in Eupen-Malmedy by his general secretary, Pierre Van Werveke. Baltia himself would be based at the military headquarters in Aachen. AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916-1949), 26 November 1923.

¹⁸⁹AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916-1949), 10 December 1923.

¹⁹⁰Carl Henrik Höjer, *Le régime parlementaire belge de 1918 à 1940* (Uppsala & Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1946), 137-144.

¹⁹¹Pierre Forthomme (1877-1959), deputy for the *arrondissement* of Verviers (elected November 1921), later served in the senate (1932-1936). Hubert Willems, *Le ministre libérale Albert Devèze (1881-1959) et Eupen-Malmedy- St. Vith: l'amour sacré de la patrie* (1989) [Unpublished], 11.

¹⁹²AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916-1949), 14 April 1924.

had been overseen by Baltia's secretary general, Pierre Van Werveke.¹⁹³ In view of the lessons learned from the Flemish question, Van Werveke and his commission proposed that in the future all texts in the *Moniteur Belge* be published in three languages. Pouillet was sceptical towards the proposal, claiming that it would meet with considerable public hostility. The fact that Belgians would see their laws and legislation 'printed in the language of the *boche*', he argued, was not something that would curry much favour. 'The *Moniteur* had to remain exclusively bilingual.'

When the Belgian cabinet met on 16 June, Forthomme made a renewed attempt to have the incorporation of the three districts delayed until after the next legislative elections expected later in the year. However, his pleas were once again ignored.¹⁹⁴ Whatever form the reattachment would take would need to be seriously considered from a pragmatic point of view, whether in terms of administration or political representation. If the three districts were to form a separate administrative entity, the fear was that they could become a springboard for pro-German agitation. Any decision therefore would have to be carefully considered.¹⁹⁵

POLITICAL INCORPORATION: 'INTO THE BELGIAN FAMILY'

The debates leading up to the termination of Baltia's regime reflected the anxieties apparent within Belgian political circles and in every village and home in the newly attached territory. A parliamentary debate on the question took place in early March 1925, during which the POB proposed an amendment to the *projet de loi* advocating that the three districts form a separate electoral entity, electing one member each to the parliament and to the senate. Rejecting suggestions that such a scenario would be detrimental to the security of the state, the POB leader, Émile Vandervelde, insisted that 'it would be even more dangerous to impose a status on these people which they do not want'. In his opinion, they had lived under 'a dictatorial regime', and were not free to express their opinions openly for fear of retaliation. In essence, therefore, they possessed

¹⁹³AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 26 May 1924. AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 31 May 1924.

¹⁹⁴AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 16 June 1924.

¹⁹⁵AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 30 June 1924.

'no rights, no responsibilities'. In the event of the territory forming a separate electoral constituency, and if the inhabitants voted for a candidate representing dissident elements, he argued that Belgium would then have a duty to listen to what was being said.¹⁹⁶

During the debate, Vandervelde revisited the historical genesis of Belgium's claim to Eupen-Malmedy, pointing out that rather than having previously formed part of Belgium, the districts instead had comprised either part of the Belgian provinces of the Holy Roman Empire or of the French *département* of Ourthe. Therefore, what had been achieved during the period of Baltia's regime had not been a reannexation but rather instead an annexation. Vandervelde and his POB colleagues were insistent that the inhabitants of Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith be allowed to vote separately in the forthcoming national elections and not be 'confounded in the electoral mass of the arrondissement of Verviers'.¹⁹⁷

The outgoing foreign minister, Henri Jaspar, was in no doubt, however, that 'the moment had come to integrate these people *'dans la famille belge'*. To do otherwise would mean that instead of a *'désannexion'* from Germany, Belgium would have performed merely an opportunistic annexation, and this did not sit well with 'the esteemed role played by Belgium during the war'. However, Jaspar did not concur with Vandervelde that the three cantons be organized as 'distinct districts'. The foreign minister gave as his primary reason the fact that the Belgian constitution organized the country by provinces, and that the elected representatives were also organized by province. Hence a special dispensation for these cantons, in his view, was neither preferable nor feasible. In any event, Jaspar was at pains to point out that to endeavour to create a distinct province would allow the inhabitants of the *cantons redimés* to 'separately exercise their first sovereign right', which he believed would only result in undermining the entire project of assimilation—something which he feared would 'give a grave characteristic to the annexation'.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶APB, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 855–856; *Le Soir*, 5 March 1925; Pabst, 'Eupen-Malmedy', 331–342.

¹⁹⁷Émile Vandervelde, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 856.

¹⁹⁸APB, Henri Jaspar, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 855–857; Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 329–332; Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 110–111.

Throughout the debate, the atmosphere remained tense. Once again reference was made to the dubious nature of the popular consultation which had taken place five years earlier. Pouillet decided to concern himself in the debate with what he understood to be 'the wishes of the populations' [sic] of *la nouvelle Belgique*, which 'did not so much entail forming an *arrondissement* apart, than remaining together'. This, according to Pouillet, was the 'great preoccupation' of the inhabitants of these territories.¹⁹⁹ However, Vandervelde was insistent that the population of Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith was not in favour of a pronouncement from Brussels that would see them absorbed into the *arrondissement* of Verviers. He claimed that a number of representatives from the territory had told him that it would be akin to 'an assault on the Rights of Man'.²⁰⁰ He pointed to similar sentiments expressed in several petitions signed by employer and agricultural associations in Eupen-Malmedy, as well as petitions from all the Christian associations in the region. In this sense, the representative for Brussels believed that the inhabitants had formed a '*union sacrée*' against the government proposal.²⁰¹ In response, the interior minister offered evidence of his own engagement with the local population of *la nouvelle Belgique* including leaders of workers' organizations, peasant and bourgeois alike. Citing representations from the *Landwirtschaftlichen Vereins Bellevaux*, the communal councils of Kettenis, New Moresnet and Rhommen, Pouillet noted how all demanded that the three cantons stay together while offering 'no objection to a fusion with old Belgium'.²⁰² In his memoirs, Baltia recalled that while Pouillet had met with many people during his visit to Malmedy in 1924, 'he only half understood them, and did not know how to make himself understood'. He accused Pouillet of 'pretending to be able to speak German, but only being able to express himself in poor Flemish, augmented by some English words'. What was worse, as far as Baltia was concerned, was that 'he made promises that he was unable to keep'. While he may have had 'the best of intentions', it was clear to

¹⁹⁹ APB, Prosper Pouillet, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 858–860.

²⁰⁰ APB, Emile Vandervelde, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 860.

²⁰¹ APB, Vandervelde, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 856.

²⁰² APB, Pouillet, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 860.

Baltia at least that Pouillet was out of touch with the situation inside 'new Belgium'.²⁰³

One of the more nuanced offerings in the integration debate came from the socialist Léon Troclet who, together with his colleagues Émile Vandervelde, Jules Destrée, Francis Fischer, Jules Hoen and Édouard Anseele, had signed the POB amendment to the *projet de loi* on the definitive status of the cantons. Troclet had been a long-serving representative for Liège since 1900 and would continue in that capacity until his death in 1946. He observed that while the majority of the cantons' population were not hostile to Belgium per se, they were far from thrilled at the prospect of an immediate and full absorption by the state. Apart from this, there were other considerations: 'Don't forget', he warned those assembled, 'that alongside this majority who will assimilate bit by bit to the Belgian regime, there are in the population elements capable of working the minds to turn them against Belgium.'²⁰⁴ For this reason, a prolonged period of assimilation was preferable. Troclet's recommendation in this way was very much in keeping with that expressed by Baltia prior to his departure. Henri Jaspar accused Troclet and his colleagues of wishing to delay the incorporation of the cantons to the *arrondissement* of Verviers for fear of losing the socialist majority on the provincial council of Liège. However, Troclet was adamant that what was being demanded in the petitions presented to the POB by the inhabitants of the cantons was a clear call for an extension of the transitory period, during which the population could then 'gradually and quickly move closer to full assimilation'.²⁰⁵ He observed how:

Having endured a transitory regime, they wish for a further period before being led to a total absorption within the entire country. They ask that this stage lasts three more years...²⁰⁶

The argument from the government benches that the socialist amendment proposing the creation of a distinct electoral entity comprising

²⁰³Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 43.

²⁰⁴APB, Léon Troclet, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 861.

²⁰⁵APB, Léon Troclet, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 862.

²⁰⁶Ibid.

the three cantons was anti-constitutional was derided by the POB.²⁰⁷ Its members argued that the transitory regime itself under Baltia fell outside the parameters of the Belgian Constitution, but that this was deemed necessary by the Belgian government of the day in order to facilitate the incorporation of the territories into the Belgian state. All that was now being sought by the POB was a further extension of that transitory period. Indeed, one of the primary reasons for this amendment was the fear that to ignore the wishes of the inhabitants could give rise to future difficulties between Belgium and Germany. Jules Destrée cautioned whether it was the best idea 'that we one day have at our flank, a recriminatory irredentism'. By allowing the cantons to have their own parliamentary deputy and senator directly mandated to represent them in the Belgian houses of parliament, Destrée believed, would make it much easier for Brussels to consider their concerns with 'fraternal attention'. However, in the future Destrée hoped that, following a prolonged period of transition, 'these new Belgians could be included among the mass of ancient Belgians'.²⁰⁸ In the meantime, however, it had to be ascertained whether or not these 'new Belgians' wanted to be considered thus.

The deputy for Liège invested considerable energy in demonstrating to the *Chambre* that *la nouvelle Belgique* was far from ready to be fully assimilated to Belgium. He drew attention to the fact that even though the communal elections had been successfully held in the districts in 1922, the institution of professional burgomasters named under the Prussian regime was still in place. Not only that, but the taxation system in the communes was still not in compliance with that which applied inside Belgium. In these and other practical ways, he argued that the reattachment remained incomplete. The debate in the *Sénat* two days later was once again characterized by impassioned pleas from the opposition benches to accept the POB amendment. However, the amendment to create a separate administrative *arrondissement* was eventually defeated. On 6 March 1925, the incorporation law was finally passed, which provided for the abolition of the Eupen-Malmedy government within three months. Thus, on 1 June the government of Eupen-Malmedy was

²⁰⁷In the *Sénat* two days later, Pouillet reiterated the unconstitutionality of the socialists' recommendation. Prosper Pouillet, *Sénat*, 6 March 1925, 614.

²⁰⁸APB, Jules Destrée, *Chambre*, 4 March 1925, 864.

abolished. Henceforth, the three cantons would be subordinated to the *arrondissement* of Verviers, which, by the time of the next parliamentary election, would, instead of five send six representatives to the Belgian parliament.²⁰⁹ Opening the debate in the *Sénat* on the bill for the unification of Eupen, Malmedy and St. Vith to Belgium, Senator Robert Marie Léon, the Seventh Duke of Ursel, affirmed that '[i]t is in effect indispensable that the populations of the redeemed cantons feel that they are part of the Belgian family', and that only time would tell to what extent this was the case.²¹⁰

Although Baltia had been successful in achieving a thorough incorporation of the cantons of 'new Belgium' into the administrative, judicial and legislative framework of the Belgian state, the assimilation of the two communities remained a work in progress. In his third report to the interior minister in the summer of 1922, Baltia was satisfied that from the political perspective at least 'the assimilation of mind-sets (*esprits*) to the Belgian regime and ideas' was progressing slowly while 'we gained ground everyday'. However, he warned that 'if we go too fast we risk running aground', as one could not expect 'enthusiasm towards a new regime' from such 'a rational population'.²¹¹ The process of cultural assimilation that paralleled that of political integration was still in its nascent stage. As late as 1922, he remained confident that 'all these grievances against the French administration' would not, 'in good faith', be levelled against his government.²¹² It was little surprise then that Baltia himself seemed somewhat aggrieved by the termination of his office in 1925. Both he and his secretary general, Pierre Van Werveke, were critical of the decision by Brussels to terminate the regime prematurely. Commenting over a decade later, Van Werveke did not mince his words when he wrote:

The governments that have come to power since the war, have not examined the questions touching the new territory, neither with intelligence or care. They went with approximate solutions. The ministers responsible, finding the issue of rather negligible importance, passed it on to their

²⁰⁹ APB, Le Duc d'Ursel, *Sénat*, 6 March 1925, 609.

²¹⁰ Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 111.

²¹¹ Rapport sur l'activité, iii, 2.

²¹² Erinnerungen, 00079; Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 88.

subordinates. A process during which they barely hid their incomprehension and their laziness. They forgot, but did they not know the words of Rabelais; a country conquered is like a new-born child, which must be nursed and rocked.²¹³

To paraphrase Van Werveke, having handed the 'new-born child' over to its *mère patrie*, the wet nurse that was the Eupen-Malmedy government saw its charge neglected to the point that the work undertaken during the period of transition was in danger of unravelling. Already the Belgian political elite began to look upon the newly annexed territory in terms of its electoral impact, placing little emphasis on the needs of the people most affected by the change of sovereignty. This augured badly for the future, and as the following chapter will demonstrate, Belgium's ambiguous attitude to its newly gained territory would become even more pronounced.

²¹³Pierre Van Werveke, *La Belgique et Eupen-Malmedy: Où en sommes nous?* (Bruxelles: Les Éditions du Pays Belge, 1937), 11.

‘Road to Abandonment’: Belgium’s Approach to Eupen-Malmedy, 1925–1929

At the inception of Baltia’s transitory regime in 1920, Belgium had promised to welcome the people of Eupen-Malmedy with ‘open arms’, as *frères retrouvés* (rediscovered brothers). Following the termination of the regime five years later, these ‘new Belgians’ expected to experience finally the manifestation of that affirmation. Instead, as things transpired, in the immediate wake of Baltia’s departure, the people of Eupen-Malmedy were kept at arm’s length. By 1925 with the introduction of legislation terminating Baltia’s transitory regime, the corridors of the *Rue de la Loi* and the *Wilhelmstrasse* were already reverberating rumors of a potential retrocession of the majority German-speaking districts to Germany. The retrocession it was believed, would be tied to a resolution of the relentless mark question, where over six billion German marks, most of which had been put into circulation during the occupation, would be reclaimed by Germany, and the Belgian state reimbursed. The mark question had festered at the heart of Belgium’s financial instability since the end of the war, and its resolution had been an elusive Belgium objective since the peace negotiation in Paris. Although the attempted retrocession would come to nothing, what follows will demonstrate how the attempted *Rückkauf* exposed beyond doubt the extent of Belgium’s ambivalence over Eupen-Malmedy. It also went some way towards undermining the legitimacy of the annexation.

The approach adopted in this part of the study breaks with that of the preceding chapters, as the fate of the people of Eupen-Malmedy would once more form part of significant discussions and strategies in

the immediate aftermath of the transitory regime. The emphasis on the diplomatic deliberations over Eupen-Malmedy in this chapter is of particular importance, as during this time discussions over the fate of the redeemed cantons were centre stage, as Germany set about undoing various elements of the Versailles Treaty. Far from being an insignificant tranche of territory on Germany's western periphery, Eupen-Malmedy would now become the *pièce de résistance* of German irredentist ambitions. Brussels, for its part, far from being offended by these German overtures, made great efforts to satiate Germany's territorial appetite for a possible deal. Belgium's apparent readiness to indulge German negotiators on the question of either a *Rückkauf* (selling back) or a *Rückgabe* (*giving back*) of territory, had everything to do with the pitiful state of the country's finances, which continued to suffer not least because of the unresolved issue of the occupation marks. Therefore, before providing an overview of the complex diplomatic manoeuvres undertaken by Belgian and German representatives around a possible retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy, this chapter will briefly retrace the road map that saw the issue of the occupation marks pressure the Belgian state's finances to the edge of the abyss. But in the spring of 1925 the inhabitants of Belgium's newly annexed cantons could not see beyond the forthcoming parliamentary elections, the first in which they would participate as Belgium's newest citizens.

A TASTE OF THINGS TO COME: THE 1925 ELECTION

Throughout the spring of 1925, representatives of Belgium's main political parties visited the towns and villages of Eupen, Malmedy and St Vith, promising the 'redeemed brothers' a much freer and more inclusive political existence than that which they had enjoyed under the Reich, and latterly under the transitory regime. 'Soon you will feel the difference', exclaimed the outgoing Liberal representative for Verviers, and minister for national defence, Pierre Forthomme, at a rally, when comparing the political future that awaited these rediscovered brothers with the state of exception that had gone before.¹ Prior to the annexation, Germany's Catholic Party (*Zentrum Partei*) had enjoyed strong support

¹Pierre Forthomme addressing a Liberal Party meeting at the Hôtel de l'Europe, *La Nouvelle Belgique*, 4 April 1925.

throughout the districts.² Belgium's Catholic Party (*Parti Catholique*) candidate, Jean Mathieu Jenniges, who hailed from neighbouring Verviers, could justly expect to benefit from such a fecund Catholic constituency. Jenniges, a lawyer of German extraction, was highly favoured to take a seat.³ The new candidate for the POB was the twenty-five year-old idealistic lawyer Marc Somerhausen. Somerhausen had practised for some time in Brussels, but was now based in St Vith; the only other candidate with close ties to the districts.⁴

The election in 'New Belgium' was not without some controversy. Initial results pointed to a win for Jenniges, until a recount discovered that hundreds of spoiled votes had been incorrectly accredited to him.⁵ One possibility that might explain the discrepancy could be that these 'new Belgians' were not used to the Belgian voting system. Although the Catholic Party had taken two-thirds of the votes in the districts, it would be Somerhausen and not Jenniges who would win the day. Somerhausen's election owed much to the majority socialist vote in the urbanized and populated *arrondissement* of Verviers to which Eupen, Malmedy and St Vith were now attached. The two Catholic Party candidates elected for the *arrondissement* of Verviers were Pierre David and Sébastien Winandy. In order to placate an enraged electorate in the cantons, as well as many in the Catholic Party, it was recommended that Jenniges would be returned as a non-elected member to the Belgian

²Pierre Maxence, *Les atouts gaspillés, ou le drame des Cantons de l'Est* (St. Nikolaas: D'Hondt, 1951), 29–30; Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 354–356.

³During the election campaign, Jenniges was the target of much anti-German vitriol. One particular account in *L'Express* reminded its readers that Jenniges, who was born in Verviers ('by chance'), was of German parentage and had been 'severely punished by the Conseil de l'Ordre for his 'pro-boche' behaviour during the war. 'Les superpatriotes du cléricanisme' *L'Express*, 10 April 1925.

⁴Marc Somerhausen (1899–1992) served in the Great War, after which he undertook some study in the United States. First elected to the Belgian parliament in 1925–1929 and again for the period 1932–1936, he was a staunch advocate for a new and secret plebiscite in the cantons up to 1933 when the political environment not only in the cantons but throughout Europe became more extreme following the coming to power of the National Socialists in Germany. Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 117–118.

⁵'Das Ergebnis der Wahlen! Dr Jenniges ist gewählt!', *Der Landbote*, 8 April 1925; 'Les résultats officiels', *La Nouvelle Belgique*, 11 April 1925.

Sénat. However, Jenniges did not put himself forward.⁶ Criticism of the election and questions about its eventual outcome were raised in the local media, which called to mind the farcical events of 1920 and the public expression of opinion.⁷

The POB achieved the largest share of the national vote in the election, although in terms of seats won it was on a par with the Catholic Party, with each returning 78 members.⁸ While no indigenous pro-German party had campaigned in the election, the socialists had strongly advocated the holding of a new and secret plebiscite on the future status of the territory. Within months of his election, an eager Somerhausen presented a bill to parliament recommending the establishment of a separate electoral district comprising Eupen, Malmédy and St Vith. On its first reading, the bill was well received. However, following the charge from Belgium's Interior Minister Édouard Rolin-Jaequemyns that if such a bill were to pass, Belgium's political honour would be sacrificed, and that he for one would duly resign, the bill eventually lost its momentum.⁹

The inconclusive outcome of the election was followed by 73 days of political wrangling before a new government was eventually formed, the longest such gap of the interwar period. The Socialists had benefited greatly from the public's dissatisfaction with the Catholic–Liberal coalition government and with the rising cost of living. The protracted delay in forming a government, however, was hardly the greatest demonstration to the people of Eupen, Malmédy and St Vith of the benefits attaching to becoming Belgian.¹⁰ It was at best an omen of the unstable

⁶Heinz Warny, *Erste Schritte im Nebel: Grenz Echo (1926–1940)*, in Heinz Warny (ed.) *Zwei Jahrhunderte deutschsprachige Zeitung in Ostbelgien* (Eupen: Grenz Echo Verlag, 2007), 11–78 (19–21).

⁷'Warum ist Herr Jenniges nicht gewählt?', *Eupener Nachrichten*, 25 May 1925; Heidi Christmann, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation in Eupen-Malmédy zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen* (Munich, 1974) [Unpublished], 249.

⁸Roger E. de Smet, René Evalenko & William Fraeys, *Atlas des élections belges 1919–1954: Annexe statistique* (Bruxelles: Institut de Sociologie Solvay, 1958), 10.

⁹Pabst, Eupen-Malmédy, 334.

¹⁰Carl Henrik Höjer, *Le régime parlementaire belge de 1918 à 1940* (Uppsala and Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1946), 145–147; Emmanuel Gerard, *La démocratie rêvée, bridée et bafouée, 1918–1939*, in Michel Dumoulin, Emmanuel Gerard, M. Van den Wijngaert & V. Dujardin, *Nouvelle histoire de Belgique 1905–1950* (2 vols), ii, (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe), 96.

political and economic landscape that would characterize the politics of the interwar period for these 'new Belgians'. This instability was rooted in the precarious financial position in which Belgium found itself after the war. The source of most of the country's ills was the dire state of its economy, which had been ravaged by four years and four months of a brutal occupation. The country's already difficult financial situation was exacerbated in the wake of the war by the protracted problem of what came to be referred to as the mark question.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: THE MARK QUESTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR 'NEW BELGIUM'

Apart from the trauma endured in terms of human suffering, the war had devastated Belgium structurally, economically and financially. By the end of the war, the country's industrial production capacity had plummeted to less than a third of its pre-war figure.¹¹ In the immediate post-war phase, the Belgian government paid out some eight billion francs against claims for war damage to property, and half that again on personal disability claims. A further four billion francs were spent on the rehabilitation of the state's rail network and on a range of regeneration projects. Together with repayments to banks and provincial administrations to compensate them for their war contributions, the amount expended by the Belgian government between 1920 and 1926 came to almost 15 billion francs.¹² During the war, Belgium had borrowed almost \$1 billion from France, Britain and the USA combined, to finance the war effort. However, in the aftermath of the peace negotiations in Paris, Belgium found itself relieved of its war debt to both France and Britain. Article 232 of the Versailles Treaty transferred Belgium's war debt obligations to Germany 'as a consequence of the violation of the Treaty of 1839, to make reimbursement of all sums which Belgium has borrowed from the Allied and Associated Governments up to November 11, 1918',¹³

¹¹Peter Scholliers, *Koopkracht en indexkoppeling: de Brusselse levensstandaard tijdens en na de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Purchasing power index: Brussels' standard of living during and after the First World War), *Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, IX (1978), 333–338 (335).

¹²Henry L. Shepherd, *The Monetary Experience of Belgium, 1914–1936* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 16–17.

¹³The Versailles Treaty, i.232.

However, the United States did not ratify the Treaty of Versailles, and as a consequence Belgium's debt to the USA could not be assigned to Germany.¹⁴ Alongside the war loans issued by the USA, Belgium also received post-armistice loans to help rebuild the country's infrastructure. In spite of this, the heavy costs of reconstruction meant that the state operated a budget deficit of 27.867 billion francs between 1919 and 1926.¹⁵

Throughout the period of the occupation, the German authorities had imposed occupation costs on Belgium starting at 40 million Belgian francs per month in December 1914. By November 1916, the imposition had increased to 50 million Belgian francs per month for the first half of 1917, climbing to 60 million francs up to the end of the occupation.¹⁶ The German occupying authorities made the *Reichsbank* note legal tender in Belgium by a decree of 3 October 1914, at an exchange rate of 1.25 Belgian francs to the mark. The priority for the Belgian government after the war was to deal with this most immediate financial problem by withdrawing these marks from circulation, which it was hoped would result in 'the purifying of the monetary circulation'. The government began issuing decrees on the exchange of German marks even before the armistice had been called, and while the country was still attempting to re-establish control of its borders. By a decree of 9 November 1918, the government, which was still situated in Le Havre, set the rate of exchange at 1.25 francs to the mark. At the time, Belgium's Prime Minister Gérard Cooreman and his cabinet believed that the people of Belgium had suffered enough pain and deprivation, and decided not to alter the rate of exchange that had been imposed by the occupation authorities.¹⁷ The actual value of the mark at that time fluctuated between 65 and 70 Belgian centimes.¹⁸ In total, just over six

¹⁴The repayment terms associated with Belgium's debt to the USA were agreed in Washington, on 18 August 1925. On 31 December, Belgium agreed terms with Great Britain regarding its post-war debts and its Congo debts. Paul Hymans, Belgium's position in Europe, *Foreign Affairs*, 9 (1) (October 1930), 54–64 (62).

¹⁵Richard H. Meyer, *Bankers' Diplomacy: Monetary Stabilization in the Twenties* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970), 16–17.

¹⁶Shepherd, *The Monetary Experience of Belgium*, 8–9.

¹⁷Sally Marks, *Innocent abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 179.

¹⁸Grathwol, Germany and the Eupen-Malmedy affair, 223.

billion marks were redeemed either in the form of currency or restoration bonds. Out of the total redeemed, between one-sixth and a third had not been in circulation during the occupation. Thus, a considerable amount of German currency had found its way into Belgium after the Germans had withdrawn from the territory. While some of the contraband currency had been detected in Eupen-Malmedy, it circulated throughout the Belgian state.¹⁹

Belgium had sought to have the matter of the occupation marks dealt with as part of the armistice negotiations. When this failed, it was thought that the issue could be dealt with at the Paris Peace Conference. However, neither Britain nor France was interested in supporting Belgium's claims for reimbursement and therefore the marks question was not catered for in the Versailles Treaty.²⁰ Hence, Brussels was forced to pursue a number of bilateral initiatives with Germany in the immediate post-war period to secure a resolution of the marks question. Belgian and German negotiations began on 2 November 1919 between delegations from both sides. The Belgian side was led by the financier Émile Francqui, who during the war had played a part in the establishment of the *Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation* (CNSA), which was a relief organization dedicated to the allocation of food and essential supplies to the Belgian population during the occupation.²¹ The German negotiators were led by Germany's Vice-Chancellor and Finance Minister Matthias Erzberger. An eventual agreement was reached on 25 November 1919. The Erzberger–Francqui Agreement was premised on the retrieval of the six billion marks by Germany in return for German Treasury bonds. However, the agreement also contained a secret accord, which limited the liquidation of German assets in Belgium, and put an end to the extradition of German war criminals. However,

¹⁹Herrebout, *Memoiren*, 75.

²⁰Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 35. Jacques, Bariéty, *Le projet de rétrocession d'Eupen-Malmédy par la Belgique à l'Allemagne, et la France (1925–1926). Un cas d'utilisation d'une arme financière en politique nationale*, Colloque Franco-Belge à Metz, Novembre 15–16, 1974 (Metz: Centre de Recherches Relations Internationales de l'Université de Metz), 325–348 (326–327).

²¹The *Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation* acted as the distribution arm of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, which provided international aid to the war-stricken country. In 1923, Francqui became vice-governor of the Société Générale and later its governor in 1932. He would play a pivotal role in the retrocession talks on Eupen-Malmedy.

when Francqui proposed these measures to the Belgian cabinet, they were roundly rejected. Although the Erzberger–Francqui accord was a non-starter, a precedent had been set that involved a *quid pro quo* of German financial concessions in return for Belgian political reciprocity.²² The prospect of a resolution of the marks question was revived again in 1921 involving negotiations between the German Secretary of State Carl Bergmann and Belgium's Georges Theunis.²³ The Bergmann–Theunis Agreement of 1 September 1921 was endorsed by the German cabinet on 22 September but then shelved following a sudden fall in the value of the mark.²⁴ Negotiations between Belgium and Germany were taken up again in June 1922 using the Erzberger–Francqui Agreement as a starting point, but once again the initiative came to nothing, partly due to extra demands being added by Belgium, including the proposal of a tax to be levied on German properties that had not yet been liquidated. However, the Belgians also wished to sequester all German cash deposits in Belgian banks.²⁵

In any event, Germany had already begun to default on its reparations commitments, and was seeking a moratorium on reparation payments.²⁶ This did not auger well for a successful outcome to the marks question. In essence, the government in Berlin employed a wait and see approach to ensure that some form of a moratorium could be applied. In the meantime, Germany's failure to meet its reparation responsibilities wreaked havoc on the Belgian economy. By late 1922, Brussels was left

²²Bariéty, *Le projet de rétrocession*, 326.

²³Germany agreed to pay the sum of 4 billion marks (5 billion Belgian francs) to Belgium from April 1922 over 25 years at an interest rate of 2%. In exchange, Belgium would credit Germany with the profits accumulated from the sale of German property in Belgium. Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 39–42.

²⁴Annales Parlementaires Belges (APB), Georges Theunis, *Chambre*, 24 October 1922, 1839.

²⁵Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 46.

²⁶Following the London Conference of the Reparations Commission in April 1921, the allies finally reached agreement on a reparations figure which Germany would have to pay after much consultation and debate. A figure of 132 billion gold marks (\$33 billion) was decided upon. However, reparation payments took other forms also, including shipments of coal, timber and chemical products. A definitive reparations figure had not been agreed at the Paris Peace Conference and the matter was left to the deliberations of the Reparations Commission, which reached a decision on 27 April 1921. Sally Marks, 'The myth of reparations', *Central European History*, 11 (3) (September 1978), 231–255.

with few alternatives as to how to reimburse its national bank.²⁷ By then, however, even greater difficulties began to arise between Germany and France over the issue of reparations.

Ever since the end of the war, the debates over reparation payments by Germany had dogged the fragile post-war environment. Matters reached boiling point by early 1923 when French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré lost patience with what he perceived as Germany's foot-dragging on the issue, and its refusal to meet the criteria set out by the Reparations Commission. Having already threatened to act on a number of occasions, France together with Belgium occupied the Ruhr valley on 11 January 1923.²⁸ In terms of the mark question, however, the Ruhr Crisis did nothing to improve Belgium's bargaining position. By the summer of that year, following a period of passive resistance by German workers in the Ruhr (which only served to worsen the economic situation as much for Germany as it did for France and Belgium), Germany began advocating a less obstructive approach toward the French.²⁹

With the coming to power of Gustav Stresemann as chancellor in August of 1923, a more conciliatory situation began to emerge.³⁰ During the tenure of the *Cartel des Gauches* in France between 1924 and 1926, attitudes to Germany softened even more, and were in turn reciprocated by Berlin. On 16 August, France promised to evacuate the Ruhr within the year if the Germans met the military obligations of the treaty, and this in turn would see a demilitarization of the area around Cologne,

²⁷Robert P. Grathwol, Germany and the Eupen-Malmedy affair, 1924–1926: 'Here lies the spirit of Locarno', *Central European History*, 8 (3) (September), 221–250 (223); Fernand Baudhin, La Balance économique de la Belgique avant et après la guerre, in *Bulletin d'Études et d'Information de l'École Supérieure de St. Ignace* (November 1924), 3–55.

²⁸Conan Fischer, *The Ruhr Crisis, 1923–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29–39.

²⁹Jacques Bariéty, France and the politics of steel, from the Treaty of Versailles to the international steel entente, 1919–1926, in Robert Boyce (ed.), *French Foreign and Defence Policy 1918–1940: The Decline of a Great Power* (London: Routledge, 1998), 32–33.

³⁰Gustav Stresemann served as chancellor of Germany for little more than three months. However, he retained the portfolio of foreign minister from August 1923 until his death in October 1929.

then occupied by British troops.³¹ With the Dawes Plan agreed in April 1924, Germany's reparations payments became regularized for the time being, thus initiating a period of relative economic and political stability.³² That same year, Belgium reignited its efforts to seek a resolution of the seemingly intractable mark question, as a means of ameliorating the country's increasingly depressing economic situation. By then the six billion marks held by the *Banque Nationale* had lost their value due to the deflation of the German currency. Their value now merely equated to that which the Germans were willing to attribute to them. Even the newly agreed reparations payment schedule established under the Dawes Plan made no provision for a mark settlement between Germany and Belgium.

The new currency now in circulation in Germany was the Reichsmark, and Germany began to see an improvement in its own financial situation as it began to benefit from American loans. In November, Belgium's former prime minister, Léon Delacroix, who now represented Belgium on the Reparations Commission, raised the matter of the mark question at the German embassy in Paris.³³ As in all previous encounters on the issue, the discussions came to nothing. Nevertheless, the following month the president of the *Reichsbank*, Dr Hjalmar Schacht, met with Émile Francqui, vice-governor of the *Société Générale de Belgique*. Francqui was anxious to restart the negotiations over the occupation marks, and also hinted that the issue of Eupen-Malmedy might play a part in a potential solution.³⁴ On a visit to Brussels in March 1925, Schacht and Francqui discussed the matter further in the presence of Fernand Hautin, the president of Belgium's *Banque Nationale*. On this occasion, Schacht took things a step further and made a direct link between a settlement of the mark question and the future status of Eupen-Malmedy.³⁵ While in Brussels, Schacht also met briefly with the

³¹Jacques Néré, *Foreign Policies of the Great Powers VII: The Foreign Policy of France from 1914–1945* (London and New York: Routledge and Paul Kegan, 1975), 65.

³²Hans W. Gatzke (ed.), *European Diplomacy between Two Wars, 1919–1939* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 5.

³³Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 101.

³⁴Klaus Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 456–457.

³⁵AAEB, Eupen-Malmedy, 10.792/1/304/1446, Baron de Gaiffier, Ambassadeur de Belgique à Paris to Paul Hymans, *Ministre des Affaires Étrangères*, 10 March 1925; Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 102.

Belgian prime minister, Georges Theunis. At a cabinet meeting on 24 March, Theunis ruled out the prospect of agreeing to an exchange of territory for marks, particularly in light of likely British and French reactions. Nevertheless, Theunis still sought a settlement of the mark question.³⁶ But Germany, having already defaulted on its reparations, was not in a position to entertain Belgium's mark demands. In the meantime, Berlin seemed more focused on calming tensions in the Rhineland.

THE ATTEMPTED RETROCESSION OF EUPEN-MALMEDY TO GERMANY

In February 1925, the Wilhelmstrasse forwarded a memorandum to Paris proposing a pact between Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy (there was no mention of Belgium) in order to stabilize the situation in the Rhineland. The initiative came about as a result of the allied refusal to evacuate the area around Cologne in January 1925. This was in reaction to Germany's perceived bad faith in not complying with the disarmament conditions stipulated in the Treaty of Versailles. On 20 February, Germany's ambassador to Paris, Leopold von Hoesch, requested the opinion of the French foreign minister and *président du conseil*, Édouard Herriot.³⁷ Herriot responded by stating that France would have to seek the opinion of its allies in the first instance. The French also forwarded the content of the German memorandum to Brussels, even though the matter of the Belgian–German border was not dealt with in the text. The Quai d'Orsay was concerned about Germany's intention to strike a bilateral agreement with Belgium, having gotten wind of the meeting between Schact and Hautin the previous year. However, the British secretary of state for foreign affairs, Austen Chamberlain, supported the idea of a security pact that included Germany. Herriot was especially cautious about the German proposal, and warned that Germany would be once more at war with its European neighbours within ten years.³⁸

By April, Aristide Briand had replaced Herriot as foreign minister, and the following month he made clear to the Belgian ambassador

³⁶AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 24 March 1925.

³⁷Bariéty, *Le projet de rétrocession*, 328.

³⁸Ennsle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 91.

Baron de Gaiffier in Paris that the wording of the expected convention with Germany would not make any difference to the status of either the French and German border or that between Belgium and Germany.³⁹ In June, Briand reiterated this point to Belgium's foreign minister, Paul Hymans, when they met in Geneva during a session of the League of Nations.⁴⁰ Belgium's minister in Berlin, Robert Everts, on 27 June 1925 insisted to Hautin that, according to his information, Schacht had acted without the knowledge of the Wilhelmstrasse and that 'in terms of Eupen-Malmedy, it goes without saying that Germany would renounce this without a second thought, and under the same conditions in the case of Alsace-Lorraine'.⁴¹ The German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann on the other hand knew that to secure the permanency and inviolability of Germany's western borders would surely be the death knell for any future change in the status of Eupen-Malmedy. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of a burgeoning *détente*, a new era of possibilities began to dawn on the continent of Europe.

In response to the German proposal of January, a draft treaty was submitted to Germany by the allies in August 1925, and was forensically scrutinized by Friedrich Gaus, Stresemann's legal advisor at the Wilhelmstrasse. Later, at a meeting of legal experts from Britain, France, Germany, and Belgium, held in London between late August and early September, the draft treaty was once more anatomized.⁴² Even allowing for the fact that a number of phrases in the preamble to the treaty were of some concern to Germany—namely the presence of the phrase '*status quo*', and the reference to the inviolability of the western frontier—Gaus' advice to Stresemann was that the text of the treaty did not translate as a German renunciation of Eupen-Malmedy. In October, in the picturesque Swiss town of Locarno, a Rhineland Pact was agreed between Germany and the allies as well as Belgium, in which Stresemann managed to have both the term '*status quo*' and the reference to the inviolability of the

³⁹Bariéty, Le projet de rétrocession, 329. *Documents Diplomatiques Belges, 1920–1940*, ii (1925–1931) (hereafter, DDB, ii) (Bruxelles: Ch. De Visscher & F. Vanlangenhove, 1964), Document 59, Le Baron de Gaiffier, Ambassadeur de Belgique à Paris to Baron Ruzette, 28 Mai 1925, 197–199.

⁴⁰DDB, ii, Document 64, Conversations de M. Paul Hymans, représentant de la Belgique au Conseil de la Société des Nations à Genève, 211–213.

⁴¹DDB, ii, Document 72, Note de M. Everts, Ministre de Belgique à Berlin, 228–230.

⁴²Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 106–107.

western frontier removed from the preamble.⁴³ These references reappeared instead in Article 1 of the treaty. Although it seemed to most of Stresemann's contemporaries that only one interpretation could be extrapolated from the text, the foreign minister insisted that Gaus' interpretation of the treaty was correct, and that the phrase 'as fixed by or in pursuance of the Treaty of Peace signed at Versailles...' was open to several interpretations, especially when one invoked Article 19 of the Versailles Treaty, which stated that:

The Assembly may from time to time advise the reconsideration by Members of the League, of treaties which have become inapplicable and the consideration of international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world.⁴⁴

The Locarno Accords were finally signed in London on 1 December 1925. France interpreted the Rhineland Pact as a willing confirmation by Germany of the terms of the Versailles Treaty with regard to its western borders, while Stresemann saw it as the first step in a revision of the treaty. This was something which Stresemann had continually championed, but which could only be achieved out of a mutual recognition of interests. Hence an aura of constructive ambiguity emerged post-Locarno, where each side took its own meaning from the agreement. Although recognized in both the Versailles Treaty and the Locarno Accords as French territory that could not be annexed by force, the possibility of Germany approaching the retrocession of Alsace-Lorraine through diplomatic channels could not be ruled out as far as Stresemann understood it. This was also his view regarding Eupen-Malmedy. Stresemann saw in the Rhineland Pact not an end in itself, but rather what he termed 'the beginning of a collaboration of confidence'.⁴⁵

In October 1925, just four days after the Locarno Conference, Stresemann met again with Robert Everts to discuss the mark question anew in terms of how it could propel the return of Eupen-Malmedy to

⁴³The Locarno Conference took place between 5 and 16 October 1925. The Rhineland Pact was one of several accords, known collectively as the Locarno Treaties, agreed upon at the conference. The conference was attended by representatives from Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

⁴⁴*The Treaty of Versailles*, i.19, 28 June 1919.

⁴⁵Valentine Thomson, *Briand: Man of Peace* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1930), 29.

Germany.⁴⁶ Stresemann's previous dismissal of Schacht's conversations with Hautin as being without any official imprimatur was not discussed. Everts, however, displayed a similar apprehension to that previously shown by Georges Theunis about how such a move would be received in Paris and in London. After all, Eupen-Malmedy had been conditionally ceded to Belgium by Germany under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and he expressed his fear that the Belgian government could hardly be expected to 'expose itself to being reproached' for attempting to sell the territory back to Germany.⁴⁷ The shame of being overruled by France and Britain seemed to be the single biggest reason why the Belgian side demurred from any definitive commitment to a retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy at this juncture. Interestingly, Everts offered no arguments along the lines of those that had framed Belgium's claim to Eupen-Malmedy at the Paris Peace Conference.

In November, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* newspaper published an article informing its readers that the Belgians were considering a *Rückkauf* of Eupen-Malmedy to Germany. In Paris, Briand, in a telegram to the French ambassador in Brussels, signalled his disbelief that Brussels would entertain such proposals from Germany 'without talking to us'. He insisted that the French ambassador to Belgium, Maurice Herbette, convey in no uncertain terms French opposition to any deal.⁴⁸ While Vandervelde made clear to Herbette that the Belgian government had rejected Germany's proposals, he at the same time rather revealingly confessed that '[a] mistake was committed in annexing Eupen and Malmedy, but it is done and we cannot envisage entertaining German proposals

⁴⁶AA, R 29057k, Eupen-Malmedy—zeit der Sicherheitspaktverhandlungen bis zur 1. Ablehnden Antwort der belg. Regierung, E120424-5, Gustav Stresemann, Abschrift, Reichsministerium, 2534, 20 October 1925.

⁴⁷AAEB, 10.792/I/7116/1957, Eupen-Malmedy, 'Pacte de Sécurité', Robert Everts to Émile Vandervelde, 21 October 1925; AA, R 29.057 k, Eupen-Malmedy-zeit der Sicherheitspaktverhandlungen bis zur 1. Ablehnden Antwort der belg. Regierung, E120424-5, Gustav Stresemann, 'Abschrift', Reichsministerium, 22 October 1925; Carl von Schubert, Staatssekretär, 'Abschrift', 22 October 1925; AA, R 29.057 k/E120426/5-8, Eupen-Malmedy zeit ser Sicherheitspaktverhandlungen bis zur 1. Ablehnden Antwort der belg. Regierung, Stresemann to Schacht, 22 October 1925.

⁴⁸Bariéty, Le projet de rétrocession, 331.

except where France, England, that is to say our great wartime allies, would invite us by strongly invoking considerations of a general peace'.⁴⁹

That same month, the Belgian ambassador to Washington, Baron de Cartier de Marchienne, wrote to Vandervelde, expressing concern over reports that German Chancellor Luther, together with Stresemann, had renewed attempts to demand a German mandate over one of its former African colonies (either the Cameroon or German South-West Africa), as well as the return of Eupen-Malmedy to the Reich.⁵⁰ The ambassador was reacting to a report in the *New York Herald Tribune*, which was subsequently reproduced in the local pro-German newspaper *Der Landbote* in Malmedy. As a consequence, the conservative Belgian newspaper *La Nation Belge* took Foreign Minister Vandervelde to task, and wondered under whose authority he was acting by giving hope to German aspirations through the commencement of such negotiations.⁵¹ When the Belgian Foreign Ministry issued an immediate denial of claims that the status of Eupen-Malmedy within Belgium had been raised either in London or at Locarno, the Belgian press sought clarification on a number of points. One such issue raised by *L'Action Nationale* newspaper was whether in the days following his accession to the post of foreign minister:

[A] certain financial institution tied to the state but oblivious to the concept of national dignity had put in train a procedure to sell *les cantons r dimm s* to Germany against a portion of marks, which they owe us in any case since 1918.⁵²

The newspaper claimed that Vandervelde had not been averse to such a deal, and neither ignored nor discouraged newspaper reports that supported such a transaction, until now. It also wondered if in fact Vandervelde had been aware of Stresemann's overture since October. Vandervelde had made clear to Everts in November that any suggestion of a retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy to Germany was counter to the

⁴⁹ Cited in Bari ty, *Le projet de r trocession d'Eupen-Malmedy*, 331.

⁵⁰ AAEB, 10.792/I/29/4034/630, Eupen-Malmedy, Baron de Cartier de Marchienne, Belgian ambassador to Washington to  mile Vandervelde, 6 December 1925.

⁵¹ *Der Landbote*, 10 December 1925; 'La campagne allemande pour la 'restitution' d'Eupen-Malmedy', *La Nation Belge*, 15 December 1925.

⁵² *L'Action Nationale*, 20 December 1925.

spirit of Locarno. Indeed, following the Locarno Accords Vandervelde was of the firm understanding that Germany acknowledged Belgium's current borders. He quite rightly highlighted the potential impact a retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy would have on the status of Alsace-Lorraine. He told Everts that 'Belgium in welcoming Germany's overtures would gravely compromise itself in the eyes of the allies'.⁵³ Be that as it may, Vandervelde had not recommended an outright rejection of Germany's advances, and seemed instead to be thinking aloud and appraising the situation.

Unperturbed by the media frenzy around the retrocession rumours, and perhaps somewhat buoyed by the level of positive attention the matter was receiving in some quarters within Belgium, on 14 December Stresemann addressed a gathering of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Landmannschaften in Groß-Berlin*, an entity which comprised Germans from territories ceded under Versailles, where he stressed how German foreign policy should be dictated by economic motives and not territorial ones. He reiterated his view that Locarno did not in essence prohibit a revision of Germany's western frontiers.⁵⁴ A few days later, he told the press attaché at the French Embassy in Berlin, Professor Oswald Hesnard, who was a close associate of Briand, that both he and Vandervelde had discussed the Eupen-Malmedy question at Locarno. According to Hesnard's account of the meeting, Belgium had not shied away from proceeding with a *Rückkauf*. In this light, the 'redeemed brothers' of Eupen-Malmedy could be redeemed once more, but this time against German currency. Stresemann assured Hesnard, however, that Germany had no designs on Alsace-Lorraine. The foreign minister decided to take advantage of the meeting with Hesnard to stress that Germany might be in a position to provide financial support through the provision of 3.5 billion gold marks to help the faltering French currency. In return for Germany's assistance, France would agree to the return of the Saarland, and the evacuation of the Rhineland together with the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy.⁵⁵ What was clear from Hesnard's account

⁵³AAEB, Dossier 331, Eupen-Malmedy, Émile Vandervelde to Robert Everts, 3 November 1925.

⁵⁴Bariéty, Le projet de rétrocession d'Eupen-Malmedy, 331; Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 115–116.

⁵⁵Bariéty, Le projet de rétrocession d'Eupen-Malmedy, 332.

of his meeting with Stresemann was that in spite of Vandervelde's denials, the Belgians had been considering the German proposal of a *Rückkauf*.

A number of voices from within the POB were openly promoting the benefits of a return of Eupen-Malmedy to Germany. However, the newly elected socialist representative for Verviers, and the most dogmatic campaigner for a new plebiscite in Eupen-Malmedy, Marc Somerhausen, dismissed outright the notion of territorial transfer in return for marks (*Rückkauf*). Instead, he argued that an agreement could be reached whereby a new and secret plebiscite would be held in the region, at which point Germany would then be expected to reimburse the Belgian state with respect to the occupation marks. Thus, the return of the districts to Germany would be distinct and separate from the marks question. Instead of a *Rückkauf*, what would transpire would be a stand-alone *Rückgabe*. Somerhausen had no doubt as to the eventual outcome that a secret plebiscite would deliver. In an interview released, on Saint Stephen's Day in 1925, *Die Arbeit* newspaper stated that the people of the region were 'Germans of heart and soul'.⁵⁶ Somerhausen's pronouncements must have been music to Stresemann's ears and to German nationalists advocating a retrocession of the former Prussian *Kreise*.

When Belgium's minister in Berlin, Robert Everts, met with Stresemann again on 27 February 1926, he signalled that he had not received any instructions from Brussels on how to proceed regarding the Eupen-Malmedy question. Echoing Vandervelde's concerns, he stressed that the crux of the issue was the separation of the mark question from that of Eupen-Malmedy. The following month, the *Reichsbank* president, Hjalmar Schacht, paid a visit to Stresemann informing him of the latest approach from Delacroix, who proposed that Germany pay 150 million dollars to Belgium to settle the marks issue. Schacht was of the opinion that only a third of the amount proposed by Delacroix be agreed upon. In addition to the marks question, Delacroix also raised the matter of the Saar, which Schacht read as Belgium's preference for a resolution of the Saar question between Germany and France, prior to any deal over the status of Eupen-Malmedy between Germany and Belgium.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Marc Somerhausen, cited in *Die Arbeit*, 26 December 1925.

⁵⁷Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 130–131.

A fresh round of meetings in March between Stresemann and Belgian representatives kept the prospect of a retrocession alive. Meeting again with Everts, Stresemann proposed that a kind of 'friendship treaty' might be engineered between the two countries allowing for discussion on a range of issues including the mark question. He told Everts that if Vandervelde were 'ready for serious negotiations', contacts could be made between the governor of the Bank of England, Montagu Norman, and the agent general for reparations, Parker Gilbert, as to how to proceed.⁵⁸ When Léon Delacroix met with Stresemann the following day, the German foreign minister wasted little time in linking the redemption of marks to the redemption of Eupen-Malmedy. Although Delacroix, in his role as Belgium's representative to the Reparations Commission, was anxious to facilitate a resolution of the mark question, he, like his fellow compatriots, believed that any alteration to the status quo in Eupen-Malmedy could only be achieved following consultation with Paris and London, and that this would have to be initiated by Berlin.⁵⁹ According to Delacroix, it was also Berlin that would have had to initiate proceedings by making an offer on the exchange of marks. He again highlighted the prior settlement of the Saar question between France and Germany as a means of opening the door to a resolution of the Eupen-Malmedy question. Stresemann assured Delacroix that both he and his French counterpart, Aristide Briand, were in agreement that a resolution of the Saar problem was essential. In terms of resolving the Eupen-Malmedy question, however, Stresemann suggested that a new plebiscite should be held in the districts. He also proposed the formulation of a Belgian-German friendship treaty, following which the mark question could be finally resolved to the satisfaction of both sides.⁶⁰

The hesitancy shown by the Belgian government was due to the fact that neither London nor Paris had 'taken the initiative'.⁶¹ In any event, Delacroix was portrayed as acting alone as the government, 'having not

⁵⁸AA, R28.581, Belgien, Bd. 2-3, D/590670-74/91-5, '*Unterredung mit Herrn Delacroix*', 26 March 1926.

⁵⁹Bariéty observes how during the interwar period members of international commissions such as Delacroix enjoyed more power at times than elected politicians and diplomats. Bariéty, *Le projet de rétrocession*, 333.

⁶⁰AAEB, 10.792/I, Eupen-Malmedy, Robert Everts, Belgian Minister in Berlin to Émile Vandervelde, 27 March 1926; Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 462.

⁶¹AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916-1949), 3 May 1926.

charged him with any mission to this end', could not be held responsible for his actions.⁶² In essence, Brussels was playing for time, happy to let Delacroix do the running, in anticipation of a move from either Britain or France. In April, Stresemann informed Everts of his intention to present concrete proposals to Brussels, building on his earlier talks with Delacroix in March.⁶³ Belgium's interior minister, Édouard Rolin-Jaquemyns, while acknowledging the less than open nature of the popular consultation in 1920, believed, however, that it was 'beyond doubt, that the population of the annexed territories at that time were in large part lukewarm and indifferent' to the outcome.⁶⁴ When Stresemann and Everts resumed contact in late May, the German foreign minister showed no sign of displeasure about the reserve being displayed by Brussels. He remained confident that, as with the protracted stop-start negotiations over the occupation marks, both sides would soon be able to revisit the Eupen-Malmedy question, particularly following Germany's imminent entry into the League of Nations.⁶⁵ In the meantime, the Belgian government had to grapple with a rapidly worsening economic situation; public debt remained dangerously high, and speculation against the Belgian franc saw it drop to new lows.⁶⁶ However it was not only the country's currency that was in serious trouble. In May, the Catholic-POB coalition government headed by Prosper Poullet fell, and was succeeded by a government of national union made up of Catholics, Socialists and Liberals. The new prime minister and leader of the Catholic Party, Henri Jaspar, quickly set about rectifying Belgium's faltering economic situation. Jaspar's first government included Émile Francqui as minister without portfolio. Francqui had been entrusted by none other than Belgium's King Albert to overhaul the nation's

⁶²AAEB, 10792/III/43/350/26, Eupen-Malmedy, Émile Vandervelde to Robert Everts, 8 May 1926.

⁶³Marc Poulain, *Querelles d'Allemands entre locarnistes: La question d'Eupen-Malmedy*, in *Revue Historique*, 524 (October-December 1977), 393-439 (422).

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵The treaties signed at the Locarno Conference were effective from 14 September 1926, six days after Germany's admittance to the League of Nations, and as a permanent member of the Council. AAEB, 10.792/III/44, Eupen-Malmedy, Robert Everts to Émile Vandervelde, 27 May 1926.

⁶⁶Meyer, *Bankers' Diplomacy*, 26.

finances.⁶⁷ Francqui's advice on fiscal and economic matters would frame the new government's economic policy. Meanwhile in Berlin, Stresemann could afford to feel optimistic regarding the current state of affairs inside Belgium and France also.

Since the end of the war, France had entered a phase of reconstruction which was paralleled by a steep rise in the cost of living and a seemingly inexorable decrease in the value of the franc. In December 1919, the rate of exchange had stood at 41 francs to the pound sterling. By the summer of 1926, one pound could buy 243 francs.⁶⁸ The fall of the French currency together with Belgium's deepening economic difficulties provided the most propitious conditions in which Stresemann might realize his plans for a retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy. Schacht met once again with Delacroix in June in The Hague. The object of their meeting was Delacroix's revised plan, which differed somewhat from that discussed in March. His latest plan proposed that in the text of any future agreement no mention of either the Saar or the mark question was to be made, and that 'the matter' of Eupen-Malmedy was to be handled within the contours of a Belgian-German friendship treaty. This could be done following Germany's entry into the League of Nations. Although amenable to Delacroix's latest proposal, the German *Reichsbank* president was more than a little surprised by his request for a credit of 300 million marks, two-thirds of which would be paid immediately in cash. The remainder would take the form of payments on Belgian foreign debts over a twenty-year period. Schacht was unimpressed by Delacroix's new proposal and insisted that any agreement should be solely bilateral. He also wanted Delacroix's staged payment idea to be dropped and replaced with a fixed one-off payment. But perhaps the least appealing aspect of Delacroix's proposal was the amount demanded. Instead of paying the sum of 300 million marks, Schacht indicated Germany's willingness to pay no more than a third of that sum. Having later briefed Stresemann on Delacroix's newest proposal, Schacht was given the go-ahead to continue with the negotiations, even to the point of conceding to Belgium's economic demands. On 14 July, Schacht met once again with Delacroix, who was accompanied this time by Francqui. The outcome of the meeting was an agreement to formulate a Belgian-German declaration of

⁶⁷Poulain, *Querelles d'Allemands entre locarnistes: La question d'Eupen-Malmedy*, 423.

⁶⁸Max Tael, *La France et le monde au xx^e siècle* (Paris: Masson, 1989) 135-136.

friendship ahead of Germany's entry into the League of Nations. As well as this, the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy (minus a number of Walloon villages) would take place without the need for a plebiscite. Germany for its part would pay 200 million marks to Belgium, of which 120 would be paid immediately, with the balance added to Germany's annuities to Belgium under the Dawes Plan, which would commence in 1928.⁶⁹ If Belgium had feared a French veto over a bilateral deal with Germany, that prospect seemed to have dissipated, since France now seemed every bit as much at the mercy of foreign creditors.

The French finance minister, Joseph Caillaux, was desperate to ensure the stabilization of the French franc, going so far as considering German financial assistance in return for political and even territorial concessions.⁷⁰ Since November 1925, Briand once again occupied the post of French premier and, it would seem, was open to striking some kind of a deal with Germany on the Eupen-Malmedy question. Briand seemed equally amenable to reconsidering German financial assistance for France's beleaguered economy in place of US credits, which would not be forthcoming until the French could show that they had the wherewithal to stabilize their currency.⁷¹ In any event, Briand's government fell on 17 July following the French parliament's refusal to grant it the power of decree in tackling France's financial crisis.⁷² If Briand's government had succeeded in securing parliament's approval, the government would have been able to take whatever steps it deemed necessary to deal with the French financial crisis. While decrees relating to tax would have to go before the French parliament, all other measures would not have been subject to endorsement by parliament. This would have given the government a free hand, particularly in terms of entertaining German advances beneficial to the stabilization of the French currency. In return, France would offer to ensure a swift evacuation of the Rhineland and to return the Saarland to German control. Such a Franco-German

⁶⁹Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 134–135.

⁷⁰Bariéty, *Le projet de rétrocession d'Eupen-Malmedy*, 337.

⁷¹Jon Jacobson & John Walker, *The impulse for a Franco-German entente: The origins of the Thoiry Conference, 1926*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10 (1975), 157–181 (166).

⁷²Bariéty, *Le projet de rétrocession d'Eupen-Malmedy*, 337.

arrangement could only but accelerate the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy to the Reich.

Be that as it may, such considerations were now consigned to speculation following Briand's fall from power. His tenure as head of government was followed by the three-day administration of Édouard Herriot. Up to that point, a deal between Belgium and Germany seemed likely. Schacht, in his memoirs, recalls how on 21 July he received a letter from Delacroix informing him that 'the project has been sanctioned'.⁷³ The window of opportunity during which the planned *Rückkauf* might be finalized was a very small one, as any amelioration of Belgium's economic situation, and indeed that of France, would have made the prospect of a deal redundant. However, with the collapse of Herriot's short-lived government, the way was open for the return to power of Raymond Poincaré, at which point the window of opportunity was firmly shut.

The *Cartel des Gauches*' hold on power would now be replaced by a government of national union under the redoubtable Poincaré.⁷⁴ Between the fall of Briand's administration and the coming to power of Poincaré on 27 July, a great deal of diplomatic manoeuvring took place. The French ambassador to Belgium, Maurice Herbette, asked the French Foreign Ministry to provide him with the details of exchanges between German and Belgian representatives on the question of Eupen-Malmedy. The content of these exchanges pointed to a certain willingness on the part of both the Belgian Foreign Minister Vandervelde and the Belgian Prime Minister Henri Jaspar to agree to the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy in return for German financial assistance. Herbette then forwarded the correspondence to Herriot in Paris, just as the latter prepared to resign as prime minister.⁷⁵ As well as the change of government in France, other international actors were also anxious to put a stop to the *Rückkauf*. Having been furnished with the details of the prospective

⁷³Hjalmar Schacht, *76 Jahre meines Lebens* (Bad Wörishofen: Kindler und Schiermeyer, 1953), 57. An English translation of this work is also available: *The Magic of Money* (Paul Erskine, trans.) (London: Osbourne, 1967).

⁷⁴The *Cartel des gauches* comprised a political alliance of the Parti Radical (Radical-Socialist Party) and the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (French Section of the Workers' International). The alliance first formed in 1924 following the legislative elections.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 340.

deal by both Delacroix and Schacht, the American agent general for reparations, Parker Gilbert, protested against the idea of a retrocession to the influential director of political and commercial affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, Jacques Seydoux.⁷⁶ Seydoux was closely aligned to Poincaré, having served as assistant director of commercial affairs during the Ruhr Crisis. Gilbert was particularly concerned with the possible adverse effect that Germany's proposed financial transactions might have on its reparations obligations under the Dawes Plan.⁷⁷

By the time Delacroix arrived in Berlin on 24 July to conclude the Belgian–German accord, a great deal had changed, including the content of his proposal, which comprised a number of new conditions. In addition to the terms agreed on 14 July, a stand-alone financial treaty was now the preference for Belgium, one that would be devoid of any reference to the Eupen-Malmedy question. In addition, Belgium demanded an increased level of credits from Germany to be passed on with immediate effect. Finally, it demanded that Germany take responsibility for the invasion of 1914.⁷⁸ When Schacht later briefed the German state secretary, Carl von Schubert, on Delacroix's proposal, the latter found the inclusion of the demand that Germany admit responsibility for the invasion of 1914 as nothing short of unpalatable. However, he later counselled Stresemann that the issue could be circumvented with the correct formula of words. In terms of the Belgian demand that the territorial and financial aspects of the deal be kept separate, Stresemann was adamant that any prospective deal would have to include both. He also demanded that the negotiation of the deal be conducted on the Belgian side by Everts.⁷⁹ Within a week, Schacht wrote to Delacroix advising that the transaction as proposed would require 'an extensive effort' on the part of Germany, but could not be 'divided into two parts'. He instead insisted that the only way forward was 'if one acted *uno actu*'. Schacht concluded his letter to Delacroix with the request that the Belgian government

⁷⁶ Bariéty, *Le projet de rétrocession*, 339.

⁷⁷ Jacobson & Walker, *The impulse for a Franco–German entente*, 166.

⁷⁸ Pabst, *Eupen-Malmedy*, 467.

⁷⁹ Enssle, 138–139; Pabst, *Eupen-Malmedy*, 468.

provide Everts with the instructions to enable the conclusion of the agreement.⁸⁰

Two days prior to Schacht's communication to Delacroix, the Belgian cabinet met, and Prime Minister Jaspar asked Francqui if Germany would be prepared to pay 'an important sum' to Belgium that would not be premised on territorial retrocession. Francqui pointed out that the Belgian state had 4,499 million francs in Treasury bonds, leaving aside monetary bonds. Up to 31 May, repayments had amounted to 50 million Belgian francs.⁸¹ Since 22 June, the situation had greatly deteriorated owing to the French economic crisis. Repayments went from 75 million to 338 million between 1 and 24 July. At the moment of the cabinet meeting, Francqui confirmed that the state had spent one billion Belgian francs on inflation credits. If things continued in this vein, he estimated that the state would barely have enough money to stay solvent for three to four weeks. It seemed impractical, therefore, to depend on some new loan coming forth to cover the spending deficit of between 300 to 400 million francs per month, when Germany was ready and willing to fill the void. He told the cabinet that 'Germany, which is currently teeming with money following the industrial crisis has just made us a proposition'. The *Reichsbank* offered to provide 30 million dollars as a loan that would be paid to the *Banque Nationale* to the account of the Belgian state, repayable in 30 monthly payments from November 1926. Francqui argued that it was imperative that the French be made aware of the German offer before finalizing any deal. However, he stressed that this deal had the potential to transform the state's balance sheet, 'instead of disposing of 5 million dollars per month, we would have to pay only 1 million a month, which would be possible for us to support'.⁸²

While acknowledging that French endorsement of such a deal would have to be secured, Jaspar was happy to proceed. Vandervelde lent his support also, and it was agreed that both he and Francqui would travel to Paris to discuss the matter with the French. Paul Hymans, who now held the portfolio of minister for justice, was also agreeable to the idea

⁸⁰Akten Zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, 1918–1945, Serie B, I.1. (Dezember 1925–Juli 1926) (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen, 1966) (hereafter, ADAP), Document 293, Schubert to Delacroix, 28 July 1926, 682–683.

⁸¹Vincent O'Connell, Left to their own devices: Belgium's ambiguous annexation of Eupen-Malmedy (1919–1940), *Journal of Belgian History*, XLIII (2013) 4, 10–45 (24).

⁸²AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 26 July 1926.

proposed by Francqui, and recommended that '[i]n the event that it would be opposed, one should ask what [Paris] proposes instead'.⁸³ It was thus agreed that Francqui and Vandervelde would put the plan before their French counterparts. The visit to Paris would be sold to the general public and the press as a courtesy meeting between Brussels and the new French government under Poincaré.⁸⁴

On Friday 30 July, Vandervelde and Francqui travelled to Paris. In addition to being prime minister, Poincaré also held the portfolio of finance minister. He was accompanied by Briand at the meeting, who retained the post of foreign minister in the government of national union. The Belgian ambassador to France, Baron Edmond de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, was also present. At Châtel Guyon in the Auvergne, the two sides sat down to a frank discussion on the Belgian–German negotiations. Vandervelde was first to speak and revealed the details of the Schacht–Delacroix negotiations and the German offer to Belgium of thirty million dollars in exchange for the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy. The foreign minister was anxious to point out that even during the peace negotiations in Paris, the POB had objected to the annexation of Eupen-Malmedy, an act which even now he believed was 'in opposition to the political principles professed by Belgians'. Vandervelde then alluded to the possibility of a plebiscite being held in the cantons (or at least in those where the German population was in the majority) in order to justify his stance. Vandervelde's contribution was followed by that of Francqui, where he outlined the difficult financial straits in which the Belgian economy now operated. 'Germany', he stated, 'is awash with gold. It doesn't know how to spend it.'⁸⁵

Poincaré appeared incredulous of the Belgian representatives' statements, and angrily expressed the government's 'most serious objections' to any link being made between a loan to Belgium from Germany and the question of Eupen-Malmedy. The French prime minister was quick

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Poincaré took over as prime minister of France and leader of the *Democratic Alliance* government (*Alliance Démocratique*), which was a government of National Union (1926–1929), replacing the *Cartel des Gauches* under Aristide Briand, and briefly under Édouard Herriot. It would be his final tenure as French prime minister.

⁸⁵AAEB, 10.792/1/55, E. de Gaiffier, Entrevue entre les ministres belges et français du 30 Juillet 1926 à 2 heures de l'après-midi, 7 August 1926, 3; O'Connell, *Left to their own devices*, 24.

to point out that a deal of this nature being agreed between Belgium and Germany would have serious repercussions for the future of the Versailles Treaty and 'lead to the gravest consequences for Alsace'. He contended that such a deal would be 'the first blow of the axe [...] to the edifice of the Treaty of Versailles', which would 'begin with Eupen-Malmedy to continue by Alsace'.⁸⁶

Poincaré then proceeded to give a dressing-down to the Belgian delegates, reminding them that:

It isn't from France that the initiative for the cession of the cantons of Eupen-Malmedy came. It was you who demanded it, and with what insistence! I remember the efforts your king made beside me during the peace negotiations. 'Belgium,' he said, 'cannot leave the war empty handed. She needs a territorial compensation; one shall find it in the annulment of the most iniquitous clauses of the treaty of 1815'.⁸⁷

The primary concern for Poincaré was French security and the inviolability of the Versailles Treaty. Without French approval, any deal with Germany was off the table. This insistence by France severely restricted Belgium's room to manoeuvre.

During the cabinet meeting that followed on 2 August, Jaspar asked whether in light of the meeting with Poincaré and Briand it was still desirable to continue talks regarding a loan from Germany. Once again, he reiterated his insistence that the conclusion of any deal with Germany must have nothing to do with the cantons of Eupen-Malmedy. That said, Jaspar acknowledged that 'it was difficult to find abroad, conditions as favourable as those proposed by Germany'. The cabinet therefore agreed to continue to exhaust every other avenue in securing credit from 'our allies'. If they refused, it would be necessary to establish clearly, by way of proof, that the government did all that was in its power to obtain financial aid in America and in England, before having recourse to the German proposals.⁸⁸ Thus, Belgium kept the door ajar regarding a possible deal with Germany. As for Germany, a revised proposal in August,

⁸⁶AAEB, 10.792/1/55, E. de Gaiffier, Entrevue entre les ministres belges et français du 30 Juillet 1926, 5.

⁸⁷AAEB, 10.792/1/55, E. de Gaiffier, Entrevue entre les ministres belges et français du 30 Juillet 1926.

⁸⁸AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 2 August 1926.

which included an offer of 120 million marks to be paid immediately to Belgium prior to any deal over Eupen-Malmedy, was communicated to Brussels, but went unanswered.⁸⁹ It is clear that the Belgian government was keeping its options open.

What was also clear was that nobody quite knew what was going to happen next. A specially prepared twenty-page report for Belgium's King Albert I, completed on 6 August 1926 and prepared by Baron Pierre Van Zuylen at the Belgian Foreign Ministry, presented the arguments for and against the attachment of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium.⁹⁰ It is unclear whether the king had commissioned the report. However, what is evident is that Belgium's appetite for an acquisition of the former German districts had somewhat abated since the animated debates of the Paris Peace Conference. The report alleged that the inhabitants of the districts remained 'attached' to Germany, and that Germany for its part had not relinquished its desire for a reannexation of the territory. This state of affairs augured badly for future relations between Belgium and Germany. Most telling in the report was the claim that 'no serious strategic reasons' existed for a retention of the territory that would mitigate such uncertainty.⁹¹ In essence, in spite of the displays of loyalty demonstrated by certain individuals and groups who previously displayed little interest in becoming Belgian, it was generally acknowledged in political circles that the people of these districts had not been assimilated to Belgium. Even so, apart from the problem of undermining the League of Nation's decision, and the damage that could be done to the viability of the Versailles Treaty, to endeavour to hold a new plebiscite in the region would be nothing less than an endorsement of German criticisms of the popular consultation of 1920. Yet if the opportunity did present itself whereby such a scenario were possible, the impetus would have to come from the German side, either in conjunction with Britain and France or via the League of Nations. As with the line adopted by the Belgian government, whatever the *modus operandi* involved, it could not have been seen to have instigated such a move, not least in light of

⁸⁹Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 147.

⁹⁰Baron Pierre Van Zuylen was appointed to the second section of the *comité politique* at the Belgian Foreign Ministry in January 1921, with responsibility for Northern Europe. He would serve in this post until October 1944.

⁹¹AAEB, Dossier 331, *Note pour le Roi sur la Question d'Eupen-Malmedy*, 6 August 1926, 16–17.

the recent chastisement by Poincaré.⁹² The report demonstrates that the king was at that point fully *au fait* with the latest developments concerning the Eupen-Malmedy question. Not only that, but he was equally aware of the degree to which the project of assimilation was deemed to have failed. The report is also a recognition of Belgium's limited room to manoeuvre in terms of reversing the current situation, not least because of Poincaré's return to the head of government in France.

Poincaré's fate, like that of his most recent predecessor, hinged on his ability to deal firmly with France's financial crisis. If the seasoned prime minister proved incapable of stemming the fall of the franc, he too would fall from power, and once again this would play into the hands of those who favoured striking a deal with Germany. While Briand as foreign minister appeared to sing from the same hymn sheet as his premier, in time he would prove to be less in tune with Poincaré in his approach towards Germany. What is certain is that the Quai d'Orsay itself was bifurcated between those who, like Poincaré, favoured a post-war alliance with Britain, and those to whom Poincaré referred as Briandists, who advocated a policy of conciliation with Germany. These divisions had already become apparent as early as 1922,⁹³ but it was Poincaré who held sway now and, thus it seemed that any prospect of a Belgian–German deal was dead in the water. Be that as it may, unofficial communications continued between both sides.

On 4 August, Delacroix met again with Schacht, this time in Rozendaal in the Netherlands. According to Schacht's account of the meeting, Delacroix made it clear that in spite of French opposition, the Belgians had not given up on the project. At the same time, Stresemann for his part sought to restart negotiations with Briand around the question of financial assistance in return for some political dividends. Through meetings with Briand's associate Hesnard, Stresemann proposed an audience with his French counterpart Briand on the margins of the forthcoming League of Nations' session scheduled for September.⁹⁴ Stresemann indicated to Hesnard that a deal between Belgium and

⁹² *Note pour le Roi*, 18–19.

⁹³ John F.V. Keiger, 'Raymond Poincaré and the Ruhr crisis', in Robert Boyce (ed.), *French Foreign and Defence Policy 1918–1940: The Decline and Fall of a Great Power* (London: Routledge, 1998), 50.

⁹⁴ Bariéty, 'Le projet de rétrocession d'Eupen-Malmedy', 342.

Germany was imminent and would involve the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy without the need for a plebiscite, in return for a payment by Germany of 120 million marks and the absorption of a further 120 million marks' worth of credits owed by Belgium.⁹⁵

Up to the middle of August, press reports both nationally and internationally had pointed to an imminent deal between Belgium and Germany over Eupen-Malmedy. The *Manchester Guardian* recalled the infamous and much-contested popular consultation, noting how:

It is unquestionable that the plebiscite which took place in Eupen and Malmedy under the Peace Treaty was a complete imposture, and that the population was always overwhelmingly pro-German. A new plebiscite would therefore be a matter of simple justice even if Belgium were to receive no indemnification.⁹⁶

According to its Berlin correspondent, a plebiscite was likely in the autumn. The report concluded that '[h]umanly speaking, it would be all for the better if the inhabitants of Eupen, Malmedy and the Saar could be liberated from alien rule, and sources of constant friction be removed'.⁹⁷ A report in the French newspaper *Le Temps* on 15 August, however, reported Belgium's rejection of the proposed return of Eupen-Malmedy to Germany, while suggesting that the entire enterprise had originated with Berlin. The article written by the Belgian journalist and Walloon militant, Georges A. Detry, appeared to have been written with some degree of collaboration from an official source. If this were the case, its claim that 'Mr. Hymans, Vandervelde and Houtart are resolutely hostile to the German suggestion' was a deliberate attempt to smother the last breath out of the project.⁹⁸ Two days prior to the publication of the article, the Belgian government had made Paris aware of the gravity

⁹⁵Ibid., 343.

⁹⁶'Germany's lost provinces: Repurchase plan, Eupen, Malmedy and the Saar, Conversations begun.' *Manchester Guardian*, 13 August 1926; Heidi Christmann, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation*, pp. 318–324.

⁹⁷*Manchester Guardian*, 13 August 1926.

⁹⁸'Lettre de Belgique—la manoeuvre allemande pour Eupen-Malmédy', *Le Temps*, 15 August 1926.

of its financial situation, and asked for assistance in light of the fact that France had closed the door on the *Rückkauf*.⁹⁹

The article in *Le Temps* also highlighted how the any potential *Rückkauf* or *Rückgabe* would be of the highest significance internationally and would set 'a grave precedent for Poland, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, France, Italy, and Central Europe, and even for the Balkans'. It would, it argued, 'contain within it the source of multiple conflicts'.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Schacht had already approached the Polish over a possible financial solution to the Danzig corridor in the same way that he had engaged with the Belgians over Eupen-Malmedy. Thus, when the Belgian consul in Danzig, Maurice Valcke, wrote to Vandervelde summarizing the various press reports in the region that fuelled speculation about the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy, it was with these wider implications in mind.¹⁰¹ But it wasn't just in the European continent that rumours on the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy had taken hold. As late as 18 August, *The New York Herald Tribune* wrote that:

An arrangement appears to be on the point of conclusion between Belgium and Germany, by which these towns (Eupen and Malmédy) [sic] will be returned to the latter country upon receipt by Belgium of 1500,000,000 gold francs ... The transaction would amount to the virtual sale to Germany of this border territory which the treaty [Versailles] definitely turned over to Belgium.¹⁰²

On the ground in Eupen, Malmedy and St Vith, rumours of a retrocession had been in the public arena since June 1925, when a number of the local newspapers carried reports originating from the German press.¹⁰³ Under Baltia, the press in Eupen-Malmedy had been subjected

⁹⁹Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 147–148.

¹⁰⁰*Le Temps*, 15 August 1926.

¹⁰¹AAEB, 10.792/1/179/260, Eupen-Malmedy, Maurice Valcke, Belgian Consulate Danzig to Émile Vandervelde, 14 August 1926.

¹⁰²Of course, the Treaty of Versailles had not 'definitely turned over' the territory to Belgium, as this was conditional on the outcome of the much-maligned popular consultation. 'Belgium offers Germany border towns for debt', *New York Herald Tribune*, 18 August 1926.

¹⁰³Heidi Christmann, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation*, 318; *Eupener Nachrichten*, 10 June 1925.

to a rather latent but effective censorship, as he feared the corrosive effects that an overtly pro-German press would have on the assimilation process. However, this has resulted in a distortion of the historian's ability to measure the true sentiments of the population during Baltia's term of office. Once the lid of censorship had been lifted in the wake of his departure, a more expressive media articulated the gamut of feelings concerning the current state of the assimilation project and the area's relations with Belgium. As early as the summer of 1925, a series of articles in newspapers across the districts pointed to an imminent deal being struck between Germany and Belgium. Some of these articles took their cue from commentaries in Belgian newspapers, while others were influenced by reports originating in the German press. *Der Landbote* pondered the possibility of an imminent retrocession, and published an extract from a speech given by the Walloon activist Henri Bragard condemning the idea.¹⁰⁴ An article that appeared in the weekly Brussels publication *Le Boursier Belge* highlighted the high costs of the annexation, and commented on the dearth of affection among the population of *la nouvelle Belgique* towards Belgium. The article was then reproduced in the *Eupener Zeitung* newspaper.¹⁰⁵

A number of Flemish publications, such as the *Volksgazet* and *Catholic Fijl*, focused on the discourse around a possible retrocession (*Rückgabgespräch*) and seemed in the main supportive of such a development. In December, the Belgian Culture Minister, Camille Huysmans, penned an article in the social-democratic *Volksgazet* newspaper based in Antwerp, in which he supported the resolution of what was termed the '*Eupener Frage*', and more specifically the return of the German-speaking districts, in exchange for concessions on the mark question.¹⁰⁶ The main gist of Huysmans' article was rearticulated in a number of other newspapers in the districts, including *Der Landbote* and the *Malmedy-St. Vither Volkszeitung*.¹⁰⁷ Later that month, Marc Somerhausen, in line with his

¹⁰⁴'Geben wir Eupen-Malmedy preis?', *Der Landbote*, 11 July 1925; Christmann, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation*, 319.

¹⁰⁵'Aus Eupen und Umgebung', *Eupener Zeitung*, 24 November 1925.

¹⁰⁶*Volksgazet*, 3 December 1925; *Eupener Zeitung*, 3 December 1925; AA, R 29.057k, Eupen-Malmedy zeit der Sicherheitspaktverhandlungen bis zur I. Ablehnden Antwort der belg. Regierung, E120424/12-13, Ganz geheim Telegram, 8 December 1925.

¹⁰⁷Pabst, 'Eupen-Malmedy', 317; Christmann, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation in Eupen-Malmedy*, 319.

POB party colleagues, was concerned with how the entire period of Baltia's tenure had impacted on his fellow inhabitants. He was of the view that the disgraceful episode of the public expression of opinion in 1920 had served only to damage Belgium's claim to the districts. In its wake, he claimed that, if anything, the assimilatory efforts under Baltia had only served to alienate these 'new Belgians'. In an interview in *Le Peuple* in December 1925, Somerhausen stated:

One must not lose sight of the fact that the majority of these people served voluntarily, courageously under German flags. It is not a question here of individuals like the Alsatians and Lorrainers who marched *contre-coeur* [reluctantly] or deserted. Imagine the internal '*révolte*' among these people who read in their children's schoolbooks that the Germans are characterized by their cheating and their barbarity. Really, they must have a violent reaction.¹⁰⁸

For his part Baltia's secretary general, Pierre Van Werveke, described the attempted *Rückkauf* as an 'abominable exchange', which was akin to 'selling souls'.¹⁰⁹ However, Somerhausen's preference that the retrocession, if it were to become a reality, be distinct from any financial arrangement with Germany had support in a number of circles. The Liègeois academic Professor Hanquet was quoted in the *Eupener Zeitung* in January 1926 as rejecting out of hand any conflation with the redemption of Eupen-Malmedy by Germany, and its redemption of the occupation marks. His fear was that, having redeemed the cantons, Germany might renege on its financial obligations. This was not an unrealistic appraisal in light of Germany's recent record in terms of reparation payments. However, Hanquet was dismissive of the Belgian nationalist mantra that Eupen-Malmedy would for evermore belong to Belgium.¹¹⁰ Another impassioned article, which appeared in the *Volksgazet* in February, warned that no Belgian should 'count pureblood Germans among our population against their will'. The author of the article was adamant that 'we can very well relinquish miniature Alsace-Lorraine.

¹⁰⁸ *Le Peuple*, 26 December 1925.

¹⁰⁹ AAEB, 10.792/1/63, Eupen-Malmedy, Pierre Van Werveke in a letter to *Bien Public*, 11 August 1926.

¹¹⁰ 'Aus Eupen und Umgebung', *Eupener Zeitung*, 11 January 1926.

Our fatherland without Eupen-Malmedy is not too small'.¹¹¹ In St Vith, the Catholic newspaper the *Malmedy-St. Vither Volkszeitung*, which had held a rather natural political line since 1920, did not mince its words on the issue of the rumoured retrocession, when in response to the question, 'Do we wish to become Germans again?' it answered, 'We wish it!'¹¹² But not all commentary was as supportive of a potential retrocession.

The former royal high commissioner of Eupen-Malmedy, Herman Baltia, looked on from afar at what must have looked like the unravelling of his assimilation project. In an interview with *Le Matin Belge* newspaper on 18 August, Baltia invoked President Wilson's words from 1918 when he stated that 'We cannot treat their inhabitants [of Eupen-Malmedy] like merchandise which one cedes to the highest bidder.'¹¹³ On the same day, the Belgian cabinet had met to discuss what Jaspas referred to as the '*fausses nouvelles*' relating to 'supposed negotiations' over Eupen-Malmedy that appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*. The prime minister decided to release a statement to the press denying the content of the report,¹¹⁴ though not before the nationalist newspaper *La Nation Belge* published a letter, dated 19 August, which was said to have emanated from 'businessmen and industrialists of the redeemed cantons who have decided to defend themselves against the lies of Berlin, and to act before the Belgian government'. In reference to the controversy surrounding the origins of the negotiations and their potential outcome, the paper stated how it 'wanted to believe' that the Belgian foreign minister and the prime minister would urgently 'speak clearly to calm the legitimate apprehensions' that many people had. The letter warned of the potential ruin for many businesses in the region if the cantons were returned to Germany. The paper also cited correspondence from several readers, decrying the naivety of the Belgian press that seemed to endorse the retrocession. One reader is quoted as saying, 'Our honor is worth more than five billion' [sic]. The article captures the local reaction to what was perceived as hesitation on the part of the Belgian

¹¹¹ *Eupener Zeitung*, 6 February 1926; Christmann, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation in Eupen-Malmedy*, 319.

¹¹² *Malmedy-St. Vither Volkszeitung*, 21 August 1926.

¹¹³ Lieutenant General Baron Baltia cited in *Matin Belge*, 18 August 1926.

¹¹⁴ AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 18 August 1926.

government in clarifying its position on the retrocession talks. It also emphasizes the degree to which such dithering on the part of Brussels was impacting on the relationship between it and the inhabitants of the cantons: 'The hesitant attitude of the government causes us great harm before the new Belgians—who are afraid of becoming German again and worry about the reprisals that could result from it. The government must reject these German intrigues aimed at making us abandon Eupen-Malmédy'. Yet, according to the article, '[t]he government persists in keeping quiet'.¹¹⁵

The confusion concerning the Belgian government's intentions was not confined to the press. In Berlin, Everts wrote to Vandervelde on the day of the cabinet meeting in Brussels where Jaspar resolved to make a statement to the press to dispel talk of a deal with Germany, stating:

In essence I really don't know which point of view to put forward in my conversations, and furthermore I have not received any information on the talks which ought to be in hand since Monsieur Delacroix's last visit to Berlin some weeks ago.¹¹⁶

In Paris, Poincaré was critical of Briand's approach to Eupen-Malmedy, reminding him that '[t]he Reich is trying to take advantage of the Allies' temporary financial difficulties to destroy, one by one all of the conditions of the peace treaty'.¹¹⁷ However, as the financial difficulties besetting both Belgium and France continued, the prospect of a Franco-German agreement remained a real possibility. Local, national and international press reports continued to predict that a deal of some form or other was imminent. The Danish press protested strongly against setting a precedent with Eupen-Malmedy that could threaten Danish sovereignty over Schleswig, which it had annexed from Germany under the Treaty of Versailles.¹¹⁸ More importantly for France, the Polish government conveyed the depth of its discomfort over a possible retrocession of

¹¹⁵ *La Nation Belge*, 20 August 1926.

¹¹⁶ AAEB, 10.792/1/6433/1770, Eupen-Malmedy, Robert Everts to Émile Vandervelde, 18 August 1926.

¹¹⁷ Bariéty, 'Le projet de rétrocession d'Eupen-Malmédy', 345.

¹¹⁸ Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 155; ADAP, Serie B, Bd. I, 2. (Bonn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen, 1968), Document, 52, Der Gesandte in Kopenhagen von Mutius an das Auswärtige Amt, 20 August 1926, 106.

Eupen-Malmedy. France had signed a *traité d'assistance* with Poland in 1921, which was renewed in 1925 in order to assuage Polish fears about the consequences of Locarno. International outrage over, the reputed retrocession was in spite of the fact that Jaspar, following up on his commitment to the cabinet, gave an interview to the British newspaper the *Daily Telegraph* on 21 August, stating 'there have never been, and there will not be, official negotiations on the part of the Belgian Government concerning the redeemed cantons [...] there have been no official negotiations whatsoever.'¹¹⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 21 August 1926 Thus, that seemed to be that in terms of where the Belgian government stood on the issue. However, Jaspar's denial must be viewed with some degree of caution. Less than a week after Jaspar's statement, Vandervelde outlined to the German minister in Brussels, Friedrich Wilhelm von Keller, the depth of opposition in Belgium. While public opposition to a possible territorial retrocession could be overcome, the opinion of 'some elements within the cabinet' was a different matter. Vandervelde told Keller that Jaspar appeared to have changed his position and now 'speaks in grand tones'. However, Hymans was quite a different matter, and had threatened to resign from the cabinet, fearing that his achievements at the peace conference would have been in vain.¹²⁰ Apart from these considerations, Vandervelde recognized that the greatest opposition to a deal with Germany came from the international community and in particular the French. While it appeared to him that both Herriot and Briand considered the timing of the proposal as problematic, coming as it did before Germany's entry into the League of Nations, he forcefully repeated Poincaré's position with the phrase 'never and never at any time'.¹²¹ In spite of this less than encouraging appraisal of the current situation, Vandervelde did not appear to give up entirely on the

¹¹⁹AA, R28.581 Belgien, Bd. 2-3, 54/204-5, Telegram no. 179, from Keller to Auswärtiges Amt, 23 August 1926.

¹²⁰ADAP, Serie B, Bd. I, 2, Document 64, Der Gesandte in Brüssel von Keller an das Auswärtige Amt, 27 August 1926, 136.

¹²¹Although Briand had been critical of the German interpretation of Locarno, he had not closed the door on rapprochement with Germany. While not an outright advocate of the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy, at least not before Germany's entry into the League of Nations, he agreed that Article 19 of the League of Nations' charter could be used to effect change. Furthermore, Briand was anxious to develop the *détente* with Germany that had emanated from Locarno.

prospect of an eventual agreement being achieved, pointing out that Poincaré would not be French prime minister indefinitely.¹²² The following month, Germany finally joined the League of Nations. In his speech on 10 September, Stresemann called for 'enduring and peaceful cooperation' between states. His sentiments were complemented by Briand's warm welcome to Germany's entry. The occasion allowed for a private meeting to take place between the two men at Thoiry in the Jura mountains on 17 September.¹²³ In Berlin, Everts noted how the German press was reporting that France and Germany were in the process of negotiating the evacuation of the Rhine, the abandonment of the Saar, the retreat of the interallied military mission as well as the question of Eupen-Malmedy.¹²⁴

Poincaré had given Briand his approval to discuss the possibility of German financial assistance.¹²⁵ France's immediate concern was the resolution of the financial crisis, which had all but paralyzed its own economy. At Thoiry, Briand broached the issue of the Rhineland evacuation and the return of the Saar to Germany. However, Briand insisted that any agreement on the question of Eupen-Malmedy would have to be envisaged as part of the general terms of what was being proposed, and not as a separate issue. The *Volksische Zeitung* described Thoiry as a turning point in history, while *Germania* recalled how the Anglo-French meeting in Fashoda in 1898 had led to the *Entente Cordiale*.¹²⁶ Expectations of a possible late breakthrough were once again revived.

In a note to Vandervelde, Everts suggested that if the reports of the meeting at Thoiry were correct, the French were in no position

¹²²ADAP, Serie B, Bd. I, 2, Document 64, 136–137.

¹²³AAEB, 10.792/1/77, Eupen-Malmedy, Extrait d'un Rapport de Louis de Brouckère, 18 September 1926.

¹²⁴AAEB, 10.792/1/78, Eupen-Malmedy, Robert Everts to Émile Vandervelde, 21 September 1926; *Berliner Tageblatt*, 26 September 1926.

¹²⁵AAEB, 10.792/1/77, Eupen-Malmedy, Extrait d'un Rapport de Louis de Brouckère, 18 September 1926.

¹²⁶'The Fashoda Incident' concerned rival French and British claims to Egypt and control of the Nile in the late nineteenth century. In 1898, the French attempted to establish a French protectorate near Fashoda (modern-day Kodok in South Sudan). The incident was eventually resolved diplomatically, and is believed to have served as the basis for the *Entente Cordiale*.

to prevent Belgium from negotiating with Germany.¹²⁷ Another perspective was offered by Albert de Bassompierre, formerly head of the *comité politique* in the foreign ministry, and now ambassador to Japan. Bassompierre believed it his duty as a '*bon citoyen*' to offer his insight to Vandervelde. Belgium, he argued, had throughout the centuries suffered more important 'mutilations' than that of 1815. There was the loss of Limburg in 1839, and Dutch Flanders at the turn of the seventeenth century. These remained 'open wounds', and continued to affect relations with Holland. He theorized that if Holland had not remained neutral in the war, these territories could have been ceded to Belgium. Or if it were the case that Holland had 'triumphed with us', she could have been compensated at the expense of the enemy. As things stood, one could only hope that the 'lost provinces' (Dutch Flanders and Limburg) would one day return to Belgium. He therefore deplored any suggestion that Eupen-Malmedy was up for grabs. He told Vandervelde that:

It is obvious to me [that] [i]f in exchange for some pecuniary advantage or some such thing, we cede that which has *once again* [author's emphasis] become Belgian territory, we will renounce forever the possibility of ensuring the return of the other lost territories to the bosom of the nation whose amputation in the past caused us a profound and lasting pity.¹²⁸

However, Belgium's Prime Minister Jaspar was adamant that if the content of the contacts between Germany and France were found to be true, Belgium would make a formal protest to the French government. He deemed it 'intolerable that France, having made it clearly understood to us that she was hostile to talks over the cession of Eupen-Malmedy, today without consultation takes the initiative'.¹²⁹ The French ambassador, Maurice Herbette, assured Vandervelde that no accord with Germany would be finalized without first consulting Belgium. As a result, Vandervelde remained optimistic about the settlement of the Eupen-Malmedy question. However, he was adamant that Belgium needed to be at the heart of the negotiations, and not referred to as an

¹²⁷AAEB, 10.792/1/78, Eupen-Malmedy, Robert Everts to Émile Vandervelde, 21 September 1926; *Berliner Tageblatt*, 26 September 1926.

¹²⁸AAEB, Dossier 331, 10.792/1, Eupen-Malmedy, Albert De Bassompierre, Belgian Ambassador to Japan to Vandervelde, 3 September 1926.

¹²⁹AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 21 September 1926.

afterthought when all details had been settled. Directions were to be given without delay to Belgium's foreign representatives.¹³⁰

According to the account of the Thoiry meeting provided by Berlin, Stresemann had conveyed to Briand his desire for a prompt resolution to the Eupen-Malmedy question. Briand for his part purportedly replied that the French government would not object to the retrocession of the cantons if a general arrangement were achieved between France and Germany.¹³¹ The Belgian legation in Berlin threw cold water on these German reports, which were deemed to have been engineered by the Wilhelmstrasse. In any event, they didn't quite fit with the interpretation coming from the Quai d'Orsay. Meanwhile, in Paris Baron de Gaiffier d'Hestroy sought clarification from Briand in late September on the comments attributed to Stresemann. Briand read the passage from his diary on the Thoiry meeting. In it he had written how Stresemann had not renewed his 'offensive on the question of Eupen-Malmedy'. According to Briand, his German counterpart wished 'to show his loyalty in this affair', and he made an effort to 'prove that he had not taken the initiative and that he was approached from the Belgian side'.¹³² When Briand was visited by Vandervelde in November 1926, his account of the meeting with Stresemann at Thoiry was exactly the same. When Vandervelde asked him whether he had told Stresemann that the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy could be made 'part of a general settlement of all the difficulties', Briand answered, 'Yes [...] I said that if all the other questions were resolved, France would not be opposed to that which Germany agreed with Belgium over the subject of Eupen and Malmedy.'¹³³ This Briand had failed to add to his diary or perhaps had

¹³⁰AGR, BE-A0510/1252/02, Conseil des Ministres (1916–1949), 6 October 1926.

¹³¹AAEB, 10.792/I/82, Eupen-Malmedy, Extrait d'un Rapport de la Legation de Belgique à Berlin, 30 September 1926.

¹³²Jon Jacobson & John T. Walker suggest that Briand had not kept a written account of the Thoiry meeting. However, from the correspondence of Baron de Gaiffier d'Hestroy it is clear that at least one diary entry on the Thoiry meeting was entered by Briand. AAEB, 10.792/I/11667/4451, Eupen-Malmedy, Baron de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, Belgian Ambassador to France to Émile Vandervelde, 8 October 1926; Jacobson & Walker, *The impulse for a Franco-German entente*, 161.

¹³³AAEB, 10.792/I/90, Eupen-Malmedy, compte-rendu de l'entretien de Émile Vandervelde et Aristide Briand, 12 November 1926; 10.792/I/92, Suite du résumé analytique du 4 Octobre 1926 concernant la question d'Eupen-Malmedy, 23 October 1926.

decided not to reveal to Baron de Gaiffier.¹³⁴ Hence it seemed that the Wilhelmstrasse had not misled the Belgian representatives in Berlin after all. Such a preoccupation with the Eupen-Malmedy question, in spite of Jaspas's denials, shows how fluid the situation remained in the autumn of 1926, six years after the Versailles Treaty had come into effect.

While Briand may well have left Stresemann with the impression that a retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy was possible as part of a range of mutual concessions, both men knew that nothing could happen as long as Poincaré was prime minister. As it turned out, Poincaré remained in power until 1929, having successfully stabilized the franc, thus negating French reliance on financial concessions from Germany. Belgium's financial fortunes took a turn for the better also. At the inception of Jaspas's government in March 1926, a number of tough decisions were taken, including the introduction of new taxes and the extension of banking credit to the beleaguered Treasury. These measures went some way to stemming the fall of the Belgian franc, which had plummeted to a low of 2.115 US cents by 12 July 1926. Four days later, the Belgian government was granted *plein pouvoir* to address the issue of monetary stabilization. From that point forward, a series of stringent measures helped to strengthen the Belgian currency, which had recovered to a rate of 175 Belgian francs to the pound sterling by September. By then, the internal floating debt had been consolidated, and foreign short-term loans had either been cleared or, in some cases, extended. By October, Belgium had secured a foreign loan of £5 million.¹³⁵ This development proved as decisive in nullifying the prospect of a Belgian-German agreement over Eupen-Malmedy as had Poincaré's presence at the head of the French government. Thus, Belgium was no longer dependent on German financial support, and therefore the pressure to do a deal over Eupen-Malmedy had rescinded. However, the entire affair of the *Rückkauf* was already impacting Brussels' reputation within 'new Belgium'.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Meyer, *Bankers' Diplomacy: Monetary Stabilization in the Twenties*, 26–30; Enssle, *Stresemann's Territorial Revisionism*, 164.

THE 'ERA OF DISILLUSIONS': REAPING THE HARVEST
OF A FAILED ASSIMILATION

The communal elections that took place in the cantons on 10 October 1926 provided evidence of revanchist aspirations. In the words of Everts, the result was 'peremptory proof that a sizeable majority of the population would be in favor of a retrocession' to Germany.¹³⁶ The election results were indeed devastating from a Belgian perspective. Of the 270 council seats to be filled, 235 were won by either pro-German candidates or candidates supporting a new and secret popular consultation. In Malmédy, where three election lists were presented, the Socialists, who favoured the holding of a new and secret plebiscite, accumulated 1,283 votes, while a middle-class Catholic pro-German list received 983 votes. The pro-Belgian list amassed a mere 388 votes, of which 200 were reputedly from functionaries from inside greater Belgium who had come to live in Malmédy. This resulted in a single pro-Belgian candidate being elected. The socialists on the other hand secured six seats, and the middle-class Catholics took four. In Eupen, the electorate was presented with four lists: one socialist, one bourgeois, and one Catholic. The fourth was a pro-Belgian list headed by Léon Xhaflaire. If evidence were needed of the extent to which attitudes had crystalized against Belgium in Eupen, it came by way of the former district commissioner and now *bourgmestre* of Eupen losing his seat on the council. Out of a population of 12,000 inhabitants, he received barely a hundred votes. The Socialists received 1,122 votes, the Christian Democrats 1,765, and the *Parti Populaire Chrétien* 2,028.¹³⁷ In St Vith, a single pro-German list was presented, and all its candidates were duly elected. The result was interpreted by Berlin as 'the firmest support yet for the return of the two *arrondissements* to Germany.'¹³⁸ If the discredited public expression of opinion had not done enough to make Belgium's new citizens question the motives behind the annexation, the recent protracted deliberations over the retrocession of the districts had seriously undermined the relationship between *la nouvelle Belgique* and *la mère patrie*. If further proof

¹³⁶AAEB, 10.792/1/7981/221, Eupen-Malmédy, Robert Everts to Émile Vandervelde, 18 October 1926.

¹³⁷APB, Marc Somerhausen, *Chambre*, 15 March 1927.

¹³⁸*Vorwärts*, 18 October 1926.

were needed of the depth of discontent and disillusion that blighted the conscience of the population, it soon came in a highly organized and articulate fashion, in the form a collective statement from the majority of the press organs in the districts.

On New Year's Day 1927, most of the region's newspapers simultaneously published a petition addressed to the government in Brussels demanding that a new and secret plebiscite be held.¹³⁹ The list of publications included the socialist organ *Die Arbeit* together with the germanophone Catholic newspapers of all three districts—the *Eupener Nachrichten*, *Der Landbote*, and the *St. Vith'er Volkszeitung*—as well as the francophone catholic newspaper *La Semaine* of Malmédy. The hitherto neutral *Eupener Zeitung* also signed the petition, which stated:

Since its separation from Germany, the population of the cantons of Eupen-Malmédy has been unable to liberate itself from a certain malaise. The principal cause of this malaise are the contradictory affirmations which are endlessly published, on the matter of the 'political' sentiments of the majority of the population. These affirmations are based in part on the result of the popular consultation of 1920. The question as to whether this consultation merits the qualification of popular may be considered as resolved today, for it is certain that the method applied to this consultation does not give any guarantee that the people has freely expressed its will. It is without doubt in the interest of the Belgian Government to obtain a faithful image of the sentiments of the population of Eupen-Malmédy, see therefore that one puts an end to all of the doubts and to all of the polemics on the subject. As the first representatives drawn from the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmédy, the organs of the local press [...] urge the government of Brussels to soon grant our population a free and secret vote which will certainly be loyally accepted by all of the population.¹⁴⁰

On 3 February, the Belgian government responded to the open request by publishing a proclamation addressed to the governor of Liège, Gaston Grégoire. The letter was signed by the Belgian prime minister, Henri Jaspar, the Belgian foreign minister, Émile Vandervelde, and the interior minister, Maurice Vauthier. It restated the argument that, under Article

¹³⁹ *La Semaine*, *Die Arbeit*, *Eupener Nachrichten*, *Der Landbote*, *Malmédy St. Vith'er Volkszeitung*. Three newspapers did not sign the petition however: *La Nouvelle Belgique*, *L'Invalide*, and *La Gazette des métiers et négoce*s.

¹⁴⁰ *Eupener Nachrichten*, 1 January 1927.

34 of the Versailles Treaty, Germany had conditionally ceded the territory of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium and that this had been confirmed following the League of Nations' acceptance of the result of the outcome of the popular consultation in 1920.¹⁴¹ Thus it seemed there would be no question of a new consultation taking place. In their reply, which was read aloud in the Belgian parliament by Somerhausen on 15 March, the representatives of the press in Eupen-Malmedy charged that the articles of the Versailles Treaty 'had been executed to the letter but not to the spirit!' The response to the Belgian government continued:

In their spirit, they [the articles] had to assure us a manifestation of free-will, unhindered and uninfluenced by the matter of the political reattachment to our native country [...] This right of disposition, we solemnly proclaim before the whole world, was denied to us by Baltia's government of exception.¹⁴²

In a reference to Belgian nationalist agitation, the communiqué continued:

We hope and remain confident that the Belgian people which is proud of its own liberty and guards it with vigilance, despite the false excitations of a nationalist minority, will not tolerate that a tiny population of little influence remains deprived of its most essential right, to freely dispose of itself and of its patria.¹⁴³

The authors of the letter held out the hope that the representative for Verviers and for Eupen-Malmedy, Marc Somerhausen, who was due to raise the issue of a new and secret plebiscite in the Belgian parliament, would be listened to, and that the question of Eupen, Malmedy and St Vith would be approached anew, as this was 'the wish of the overwhelming majority of the population of our region'.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹AAEB, 10.792/III, Eupen-Malmedy, 'Proclamation', 3 February 1927.

¹⁴²'Nous devons répondre à cela, que les articles du traité de Versailles dont s'agit, que nous connaissons aussi, ont été exécutés dans leur letter, mais non dans leur esprit!' APB, Somerhausen, *Chambre*, 15 March 1927, 979.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴APB, Somerhausen, *Chambre*, 15 March 1927, 979.

When Somerhausen eventually raised the question of Eupen-Malmedy's future in the Belgian parliament on 15 March, he opened his address to the chamber with a brief summary of events dating from the immediate post-war occupation of the territory. He recounted how in Eupen under the command of General Michel 'we tried to give the kiss of life to the population, with Belgophile sentiments at the butt of a truncheon'.¹⁴⁵ His analogy significantly raised the temperature in the chamber, with Prime Minister Jaspar denouncing Somerhausen for having insulted a Belgian general and for 'saying such things'. When asked to provide proof of his claim of heavy-handed tactics, Somerhausen asked his detractors if they would prefer to prescribe a parliamentary enquiry to deal with his allegations. He continued by citing a number of incidents where threats and coercion were used to alter opinions radically in the territory. This process, in his view, had set the precedent for the way in which the discredited popular consultation had been executed. As noted earlier, an atmosphere of intimidation continued unabated throughout the period of the consultation. However, for Somerhausen there was an even more fundamental issue at play: the Versailles Treaty itself, which he insisted 'had not recognized the right of the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy to free disposition'. Somerhausen then cited the contribution made by the Brazilian delegate to the council of the League of Nations, Castao da Cunha, in its report on the execution of the popular consultation. Da Cunha stated that 'if the method adopted to know the will of the inhabitants of the territories annexed to Belgium as a consequence of the renouncement by Germany may not seem to be the best, such a discussion would be utterly useless, because it concerns a point decided upon by the Treaty of Versailles, the execution of which is solely in the hands of the League of Nations',¹⁴⁶ thus implying that the popular consultation itself was little more than a façade, behind which the result of the consultation was a *fait accompli*.

Aside from demonstrating the less than democratic character of the consultation, Somerhausen then proceeded to address the arguments which the Belgian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference had used to justify Belgium's claims to Eupen-Malmedy. In his opinion,

¹⁴⁵'...on essayait d'insuffler à la population des sentiments belgophiles à coups de matraques.' APB, Somerhausen, *Chambre*, 15 March 1927, 979.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 981.

following the signing of the Locarno Accords the defensive strategy that informed Belgium's claim to Eupen-Malmedy in Paris was now redundant, as Locarno had identified the Rhine as the natural border between Germany and its neighbours to the west. Therefore, the need for Eupen-Malmedy as a defensive buffer zone for Belgium was no longer tenable. On the economic front, he recommended that since Germany had 'devastated the Belgian forests, compensation was necessary'. Belgium, he argued, would be much better disposed to impose a regime similar to that which existed in the Saar, where in this case Belgium would receive full ownership of the neighbouring German forests, and then after a period of fifteen years the inhabitants of Eupen, Malmedy and St Vith could be consulted as to whether they wished to become citizens of Belgium or Germany. In terms of Belgium's historic claim to Eupen-Malmedy, Somerhausen urged the government benches to 'be logical and reclaim that which made up Belgium in the eighteenth century'.

He then approached the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, whose fate had long been invoked as being synonymous with that of Eupen-Malmedy by those defending Belgium's right of 'de-annexation' (*désannexion*). Somerhausen was eager to point out that although a sizeable Walloon community flourished in Malmedy, unlike Alsace-Lorraine, there was not the same level of anti-German feeling in evidence. He recalled how during the war some 20,000 Alsatians had deserted the German army, and instead took up arms under a French flag. In contrast, he claimed that not one person from Eupen-Malmedy had deserted to fight for Belgium. The pro-Belgian agitation that developed in the districts at the end of the war, he argued, 'emanated from a group of industrialists who, some weeks earlier, had erected at their own cost an *arc de triomphe* in honor of returning German soldiers'. The arch bore the inscription 'To our undefeated heroes!'¹⁴⁷

Somerhausen cited the work of Nicolas Pietkin, the former abbot of Sourbrodt and one of the founding members of the *Club Wallon* in Malmedy. Pietkin had never been found wanting in speaking up for Walloon culture and was a keen promoter of the Walloon dialect. He had also been on the receiving end of much Prussian intimidation on occasion. However, in his book *La Germinisation de la Wallonie* he wrote that 'despite the nuisances mentioned and the unpopularity of the *Landrat* (von Korff), the patriotism of the Walloons never waned'. The

¹⁴⁷APB, Somerhausen, *Chambre*, 15 March 1927, 981.

patriotism of which he spoke was to the Reich. He continued '[...] at the time of the Franco–German war the patriotic desire was the same, and there is the irrefutable proof that the fidelity and the attachment of the Walloons to the great *patrie* (Germany) may not be understood by their language and their nationality.'¹⁴⁸

Having addressed the chamber at some length, Somerhausen was then challenged by a number of deputies including Sébastien Winandy, one of the Catholic Party representatives for Verviers. Winandy warned that while Germany claimed to be engaged in the 'politics of appeasement and of peace', there remained 'a German party of which the real goal is the reconstitution of a bellicose and imperialist Germany'. Winandy was referring to the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (DNVP), which he described as 'the party of revenge, the party of a new war'. He accused the DNVP of 'sewing menace, disunion, agitation in the redeemed regions'.¹⁴⁹ Winandy blamed the recent successes by pro-German candidates in the communal elections on the confusion being created by representatives connected to the DNVP on the ground in the districts, who he claimed were now being accommodated by Somerhausen and his colleagues. There was also the emergence of the new cultural organization called the *Heimatbund*, which Winandy claimed had been 'seized by a German nationalistic maneuver'.¹⁵⁰

The work of patriotic German organizations such as the *Heimatbund* was deemed essential by German nationalists in maintaining cultural ties with Germany.¹⁵¹ The Eupen branch of the *Heimatbund* was officially founded on 3 June 1926. Later, another branch was established in Malmédy.¹⁵² Ostensibly, the organization was based on defending the

¹⁴⁸APB, Somerhausen, *Chambre*, 15 March 1927, 981.

¹⁴⁹APB, Sébastien Winandy, *Chambre*, 7 March 1925, 982.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 985.

¹⁵¹The *Heimatbund*, was founded in the *Hotel Genten* in St Vith in 1926, and boasted some 450 members at the time of its inception. Its founding members included an industrialist Peter Bohlen from the nearby town of Hauset, and a local farmer Josef Dehottay, who also ran the local agricultural newspaper *Der Landbote*. Bruno Kartheuser, *Les années trentes à Eupen-Malmédy: regard sur le réseau de la subversion allemande* (Neundorf: Krautgarten, 2001), 59.

¹⁵²Membership could be gained by the payment of one franc. By 1930, its membership had passed 3000. Julius Boehmer, *Eupen-Malmédy-St. Vith: Ein Heimatbuch* (Eupen: Esch, 1934), 72–74.

mores and customs, as well as the traditions and the mentality, of the German people. It had as its mission 'to attract all types of class, religion and party in ensuring the conservation of the German language, local customs and deep-rooted culture, and to defend them against attack'.¹⁵³ In response to the perceived threat posed by this fledgling organization, pro-Belgian activists formed the *Ligue Belge des Intérêts d'Eupen et Malmédy*. The *Ligue Belge* did not enjoy a very long life, the reasons for which are uncertain. Nevertheless, it did give birth to the *Grenz-Echo* newspaper, the only pro-Belgian germanophone newspaper in the Eastern Cantons at that time.¹⁵⁴ The paper was established by Pierre Van Werveke and Joseph Bartholemy, who was director of the Prisoners and Veterans Pension Fund (*Caisse des Pensions des Prisonniers et Invalides des Cantons*) for Eupen-Malmedy. In Eupen, the former district commissioner under Baltia, Jules De Grand Ry, now occupying the office of *commissaire adjoint*, recognized that organizations such as the *Heimatbund* were primed to take full advantage of the confusion created by Belgium's botched negotiations over the mark question. This was also the view of Winandy and other members of the Catholic Party. The Belgian prime minister, Jaspar, added his weight to the debate in the chamber on 15 March, and once again reiterated that '[t]he status of the redeemed cantons is definitively fixed [...] These populations are definitively reattached to Belgium, they form part of the Belgian people, they are Belgian, and will stay Belgian.'¹⁵⁵

Somerhausen's efforts to ensure that a new and secret plebiscite take place would continue, at least up to 1933 when the coming to power of the Nazi party in Germany transformed the political discourse in the cantons. As late as 1931, Jacques de Thier at the Foreign Ministry undertook a study to assess what was needed to ensure a continued 'belgification' of the cantons. The pro-German sentiment being whipped up by the local socialist media in particular was a worrying development. At the time, de Thier felt that there was more to fear in terms pro-German

¹⁵³ *Gazette de la Croix*, 10 August 1926; AAEB, 10.792/1/33/6256, Eupen-Malmedy, Ministère de la Justice to Ministère de l'Intérieure, 25 August 1926.

¹⁵⁴ G. Havenith, *Le Grenz Echo, 1927–1940: Une voie vers l'intégration* [unpublished thesis] (University of Liège, 1995) (2 vols), i, 2–10; Christmann, *Presse und gesellschaftliche Kommunikation*, 372–373.

¹⁵⁵ APB, Henri Jaspar, *Chambre*, 15 March 1927, 986–987.

propaganda from the socialists, including those of '*l'ancienne Belgique*' than from members of the local *Heimatbund*.¹⁵⁶

They [the socialist newspapers] preach the renewal of the plebiscite and by way of consequence the return of the cantons to Germany. In this regard Mr Somerhausen's newspaper is the worst of all.¹⁵⁷

By the spring of 1927, a quick sell-off of Eupen-Malmedy either in part or whole had abated. Belgium's ham-fisted attempts at selling back the territory to Germany did much to undermine its reputation in the districts, its good faith having already been called into question following the infamous public expression of opinion in 1920. Yet as the shadow over these events slowly retreated, the Belgian state would have to show just how ready it was to complete Baltia's project of assimilation and honour the commitments made in his proclamation. The three cantons were now administered by the commissioner for the *arrondissement* of Verviers, Bribosia. However, his administration of the former Prussian districts was stymied by a lack of resources, particularly in terms of qualified personnel who were at least proficient in German. In the German-speaking communes, the district commissioners communicated with their officials in German. However, the higher echelons of administration in the province suffered from a dearth of personnel with an aptitude for German. At the very top of the administrative pyramid in the provincial headquarters, nobody at all spoke the language. Bribosia's only *adjoint* was Jules de Grand Ry, who was based in Eupen. De Grand Ry had formerly been the district commissioner for Eupen under Baltia, during which time he wielded considerable authority. However, he was now said to have 'no real authority of his own'. He lamented the demise of Baltia's regime, which he believed was a retrograde step, not least in light of the fact that it had been replaced by an estranged form of governance from Brussels. In March 1927, de Grand Ry posed a number of pertinent questions about the approach being adopted by Brussels towards the cantons. In markedly a despondent tone, he asked:

¹⁵⁶AAEB, 10.792/1/195, Eupen-Malmedy, Note to Le Tellier, 27 October 1930.

¹⁵⁷AAEB, 10.792/1/207, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport de Thier, 13 January 1931.

To what must we attribute this lack of success, which we have always sought to veil as much as possible in official reports? We have made many allusions as to the true sentiments which animate this population so fundamentally German, and who, at the end of the day, never wanted to be attached to Belgium.

In conclusion, he wrote:

Neither our legislation, nor our principles can be of much aid to us in this struggle. This territory will always remain an irredentist territory and an object of discord between a great power and a small country. I do not see how we will ever be able to assimilate this population.¹⁵⁸

The former secretary general of the Eupen-Malmedy government, Pierre Van Werveke, was equally vociferous in his criticism of the premature ending of Baltia's governorship, and advised that the government appoint someone who knew the ins and outs of the Eupen-Malmedy region in order to facilitate a more seamless attachment. All the issues related to the administration of the cantons would ideally have to pass by this individual, who could act as a filter between Brussels and the people of the region. Indeed, it seemed that Brussels was considering the appointment of a *commissaire spécial*, a sort of Baltia II, but with much more restricted powers.¹⁵⁹

A Catholic Party senator from Eupen, addressing the senate in March, also lamented the lack of cohesion between the metropolis and the cantons, contending that the people of Eupen-Malmedy suffered from 'a lack of harmony' with regard to the different administrative wheels of the Belgian state. Esser made the comparison between the fate of the people of Eupen-Malmedy and newly planted trees to which great care and attention needed to be given to help them adapt to their new environment. Judging from Esser's lengthy critique of Belgium's post-Baltia approach, the soil into which these saplings had been transplanted if anything inhibited them from taking root.

¹⁵⁸AAEB, 10.792/III, Eupen-Malmedy, Rapport Jules de Grand Ry, Commissariat de District à Eupen, 23 March 1927.

¹⁵⁹AAEB, 10.792/I/213/2, Eupen-Malmedy, Jules de Grand Ry to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 24 February 1928.

In the realm of education, Esser noted how there now appeared to be far too many teachers who were inadequately skilled in the German language. As a result, teaching standards were suffering. In the area of agriculture, he pointed out how in spite of the efforts of local farming representatives little progress had been made in penetrating the Belgian market. Furthermore, he believed that Brussels ought to allow the local population to maintain the German system of social insurance, which he believed to be more beneficial to their needs.¹⁶⁰ He suggested also that compensation for war damages be extended to new Belgians who had sworn allegiance to the state and remained loyal to it, once they continued to live in the locality.¹⁶¹ Esser chose not to raise the matter of a new plebiscite, although urged to do so by many of his constituents, insisting that Locarno had ensured the inviolability of Belgium's border with Germany. Esser told his critics that the only politics now being played in Europe was '*Realpolitik*'.¹⁶² This was in contrast to the *Locarno Politik* practised since 1925, out of which the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy had become a possibility. What has been termed 'the spirit of Locarno' had more or less evaporated by 1928, not least because of the continued suspicion among the Allies as to Germany's longer-term motives.

Any prospect of a retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy or any part of it to Germany, whether by means of a *Rückkauf* or *Rückgabe*, was smothered by the amelioration of both French and Belgian finances. However, a number of other developments conspired against the possibility of a return to negotiations around Eupen-Malmedy. In November 1927, the socialist foreign minister, Émile Vandervelde, fell from power as the tripartite government of Catholics, Socialists and Liberals was replaced by a Catholic–Liberal Coalition, which saw Henri Jaspar remain as prime minister and Paul Hymans return to the Foreign Ministry portfolio. Although both men had been willing in July 1926 to see how far the proxy negotiations with Germany would go before the intervention of France put an end to the affair, they had since become resolute in their

¹⁶⁰ APB, *Sénat*, 13 March 1928, 570–577.

¹⁶¹ Landesarchiv Nordrhein Westfalen, Regierung Aachen-Prasidialbüro und Sondergruppen, 1651/6806/132, Dr Loehrs to Preussische Minister des Innern, 2 October 1928; Preussische Minister des Innern to Oberpräsident der Rheinprovinz, 12 October 1928.

¹⁶² Albert Renard, *Paix ou guerre? Eupen-Malmedy, Alsace Lorraine, L'Anschluss, Pays-Bas et Belgique* (Raymond Poincaré, pref.) (Paris: F. Alcan, 1930), 149–155.

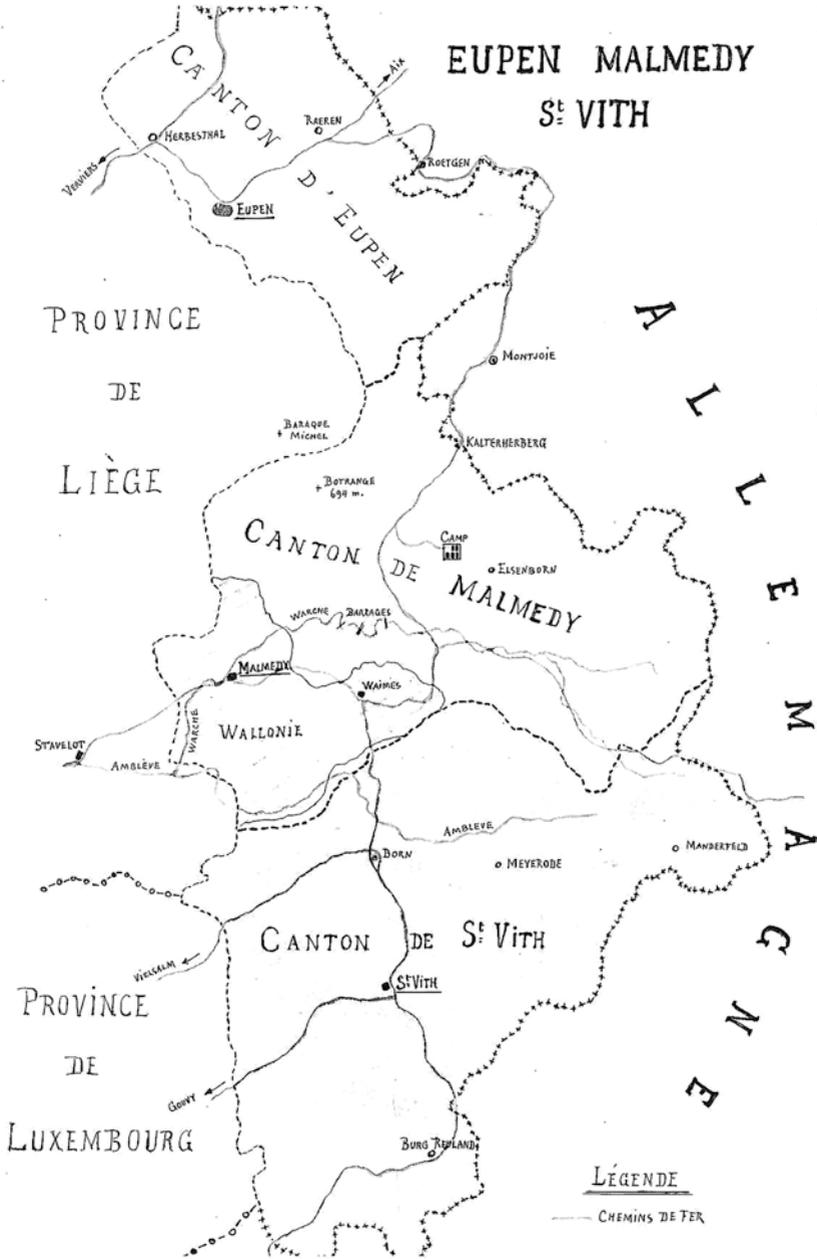


Fig. 6.1 Map of Eupen Malmédy and St Vith, attached to a report from Jules de Grand Ry to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, AAEB, 10.792/III, March 1927

opposition to any form of territorial concession to Germany. Indeed, the question of a retrocession remerged briefly in 1929 when, during the Young Plan negotiations to deal comprehensively with German reparation payments, the matter was raised by the German side headed by Hjalmar Schacht. As part of its negotiation strategy, Belgium, represented by Émile Francqui, sought to minimize any potential reduction to its receipts under the Dawes Plan by demanding that a marks settlement with Germany form part of any final agreement. Schacht in turn signalled that this could be achieved if certain territorial concessions were on offer.¹⁶³ Hymans had raised the issue of a marks settlement with the German Chancellor Müller in Geneva in September 1928, during discussions on the evacuation of the Rhineland, during which a commitment was made to agree a final settlement of the reparations question.¹⁶⁴ However, Hymans did not link the marks question to that of Eupen-Malmedy. The following month, Stresemann accused Belgium of asking too much of Germany in making the issue of a marks settlement a condition of any revised reparations agreement. Despite Stresemann's position the Belgian position claim was eventually successful as, unlike previous attempts, the Allies accommodated the Belgian demand. Efforts by Germany to insist on a quid pro quo in terms of Eupen-Malmedy eventually ended in failure. Thus, while a mark settlement was finally agreed between Belgium and Germany in July 1929, the question of the retrocession of Eupen-Malmedy was no longer up for discussion, at least from a Belgian perspective.

Following the transitory regime's termination in 1925, a series of significant developments threatened to undermine whatever goodwill had been established during its lifetime. Chief among these was the Brussels government's reluctance to build upon Baltia's initial efforts. The extent to which Brussels had altered its attitude towards its 'rediscovered brothers' was revealed when revelations of negotiations that had taken place from late 1924 to 1926 between the former Belgian prime minister Delacroix and the president of the *Reichsbank* Dr Hjalmar Schacht on the future status of the cantons were made public. The aim of these negotiations was the eventual return of the ethnic German communes to

¹⁶³Pabst, Eupen-Malmedy, 483.

¹⁶⁴DDB, Document 189, 'Évacuation de la Rhénanie' (troisième séance), 16 September 1928, 556.

the Reich in exchange for a resolution of the mark question. Although the negotiations were brought to a sudden end following Poincaré's intervention, considerable damage had been inflicted on the as yet burgeoning relationship between Belgium and the people of its 'redeemed cantons'.

Belgium's apparent commitment to completing the assimilation process begun under Baltia was inevitably cast into doubt following the revelation of the attempted *Rückkauf*. Although the initiative ended in failure, when coupled with the memory of the discredited popular consultation of 1920, the affair further weakened the *bona fides* established since then. The episode was all the more exasperating when one considers that one of the chief protagonists championing the retrocession was none other than Léon Delacroix, the man who had been Belgium's prime minister when the two districts became attached to Belgium. In 1924, as Belgium's representative to the Reparations Commission, Delacroix was facilitating a fresh approach to the question of mark redemption. Diplomatic representatives and financiers on both sides of the Belgian–German border seemed intoxicated by the ether of possibility that emerged following the resolution of the Ruhr crisis. Delacroix was no exception. In time, the sobering consequences of linking financial negotiations to the Eupen-Malmedy question would serve only to strengthen the hand of anti-annexationists who continued to campaign for a fresh plebiscite.

In the late 1930s, Pierre Van Werveke, the former secretary general of the Eupen-Malmedy government described the situation that prevailed in the borderland districts of Eupen, Malmedy, and St Vith as a 'malaise'. In an overt critique of the bungling nature of Belgium's 'full incorporation' of the cantons up to that point, Van Werveke believed that Belgium's political class had only favoured the incorporation of the former German districts as an opportunity to add an extra seat to the 186 which made up the *Chambre des Représentants*. Belgium's political parties, in his opinion, had behaved like 'electoral beasts', and their self-indulgence and opportunism contributed greatly to what he termed 'the era of disillusion'.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, from the failed attempt to sell the

¹⁶⁵ Pierre Van Werveke, *La Belgique et Eupen-Malmedy: où en sommes nous?* (Bruxelles: Les Éditions du Pays Belge 1937), 12.

annexed territory back to Germany in 1926, to the inert response given to the spread of German irredentist organizations throughout the inter-war period, Belgium, in the words of Van Werveke, had it seemed 'misunderstood the value of its conquest'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶Van Werveke, *La Belgique et Eupen-Malmédy, avant-propos*.

CONCLUSION

The seminal event for the people of Eupen-Malmedy in the aftermath of the Great War was the region's transition from German to Belgian sovereignty. The annexation was in some respects a last-ditch attempt by Brussels to recover some international prestige after what had been a degrading and disconcerting experience at the hands of its erstwhile defenders in Paris. In place of the much sought-after Duchy of Luxembourg, or the territory of Flemish Zeeland, Belgium was reluctantly ceded this troublesome strip of territory inhabited by an enemy population. The advance towards annexation was equally precipitated by the actions of specific interest groups on the ground in both districts, as was the reaction against it.

The objective for Herman Baltia as royal high commissioner or governor of Eupen-Malmedy was to make '*bons Belges*' out of German citizens, be they ethnic German or Walloon. Although Baltia was sensitive to the cultural diversity of both communities, the architects of 'Belgicization' in Brussels seemed oblivious to the nuances attached to these local identities. As Stefan Berger has asserted, the imposition of a national identity on borderland communities cannot be achieved by force, but instead emerges as a negotiated arrangement between the respective government and the borderland communities.¹

¹ Stefan Berger, 'Border regions, hybridity and national identity: The cases of Alsace and Masuria' in Q. Edward Wang & Franz Leander Fillafer (eds.), *The Many Faces of Clio: Cross Cultural Approaches to Historiography* (Oxford, 2007), 366–381 (366–368).

This study has explored the extent to which the people of these borderland districts became Belgian, and to what degree Baltia succeeded in his objective of national assimilation. It has shown how Baltia's mission of nation-building in Eupen-Malmedy was a flawed enterprise from the very beginning. That said, the cracks had already begun to appear long before his appointment. His predecessor, Henri Delvaux de Fenffe, albeit a little eccentric in his designs for the post, was merely echoing the contemporary discourse in government circles, that viewed these newly ceded districts as minor colonial collateral, a poor substitute for the suffering endured by Belgium during the war. If Baltia had described the granting of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium as akin to 'giving a gourmand a bone to chew', it was one which stuck in the throat of many Belgians still ingesting the effects of the war.

A successful political incorporation of both districts into the Belgian state depended on the outcome of the public expression of opinion, which was to be held during the first six months following the coming into force of the Versailles Treaty. Even today the popular consultation remains somewhat of a stain on the tapestry of Belgian democracy. The bad faith created by the controversial consultation was never quite dispelled, and haunted later attempts at so-called 'Belgicization', and efforts to stem the rising tide of German revanchism in the territory. This latter phenomenon continued to threaten the stability of the region up to the Nazi annexation in 1940.

But other factors played their part in conspiring against a seamless attachment, or 'reattachment' of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium. The assimilatory process was taking place while the Belgian public was still grappling, both physically and psychologically, with the traumatic legacy of the war. In addition, Belgium's internal political and cultural turbulence meant that the incorporation of these former German districts was ill-timed to say the least. For the majority of the borderland population, the primary concern was the future well-being of their families, and in this way the hard economic realities of that period played a significant role in determining the approach that individuals and communities adopted during the impending consultation.

Baltia's period of transition saw many erstwhile loyal citizens of the Reich openly declare in favour of Belgium. In Malmedy in particular, this study has demonstrated how the push towards a union with Belgium gathered impetus among economic and cultural elites. In Eupen, a number of employers worried about the effect a change in the region's

sovereign status would have on their future trading position with Germany. By the same token, the draconian reparation conditions which Germany was expected to meet augured badly for those wishing to opt in favour of German sovereignty, primarily because the expected tax toll on their already meagre incomes would be prohibitive. As well as this, there were those who looked across the border to Berlin, which was still in the grip of revolutionary fervour, as Germany embarked upon a transition of its own, from empire to republic. The chaotic convergence of these factors meant that most people were confused as to which road to take.

Baltia's transitory regime laid the legislative, juridical and administrative foundations on which the future relationship between Brussels and Eupen-Malmedy would rest. He understood, however, that the national acculturation or assimilation of these former German subjects would need much more time and effort on the part of the Belgian state. This view was not shared by the vast majority of political voices in Brussels, who believed that Baltia's prolonged presence was beginning to have an adverse effect on the advances already made. For the majority of Germans living in Eupen-Malmedy, Belgian citizenship did not equate with becoming Belgian *per se*. This distinction was best demonstrated by the work of organizations such as the *Heimatbund*. To the adherents of such organizations, rather than being Belgian, they were instead *Auslandsdeutsche*.

When Herman Baltia stepped down as governor of Eupen-Malmedy on 29 May 1925, he believed that his regime and its achievements had been sacrificed for the sake of political expediency. The Belgian government, in his view, had finally succumbed to pressure from the Socialist benches and media criticism which scorned the state of exception over which he had ruled, oblivious, it seemed, to the fact that the ends may well have justified the means.² The events that unfolded in the immediate aftermath of the transitory regime threw into doubt Belgium's commitment to *la nouvelle Belgique*, proving Baltia's point (which had previously been made by Pierre Van Werveke) that Eupen-Malmedy's

² LANRW, Sammlung Baltia, RW/10/5, Erinnerungen des belgischen Generals Baltia, 1918–1922, Gouverneur (Hochkommissar) für die abgetretenen Gebiete Eupen-Malmedy aus seiner Tätigkeit (Erinnerungen), 32–33.

future inside Belgium would be at the mercy of political opportunists in Brussels.³ The failed attempt to sell most of the territory back to Germany between 1925 and 1926, followed by the lack of a coherent plan to rally its new citizens to the Belgian flag, left many in doubt as to Belgium's true aims. The conflicting signs emanating from the *rue de la Loi* were reflected in the palpable sense of confusion among Eupen-Malmedy's inhabitants. This vacuum of uncertainty was, however, a welcome development for the advocates of German irredentism.

Border areas are constantly changing entities, the contours of which are altered by a combination of social, political and economic forces, and by discursive interaction in a mutually reciprocal relationship. This process of cultural and political sedimentation is accumulative, and defines the character and attitudes within a borderland territory over time.⁴ In this way, the relationship between the people of a territory, be it occupied or annexed by a foreign power, are affected by a number of issues, whether economic, social, political or psychological. Rather than seeing these people solely as unsuspecting victims of the whims of high politics, in the main they adopted a 'wait and see' approach to whether or not the benefits of staying in Belgium would eventually outweigh the disadvantages. The arbitrary treatment of these 'new Belgians', from the flawed public expression of opinion to the exploitation of the young and impressionable at the hands of both Belgian and German propagandists, contributed to the emergence of a confluence of conscience among the population at large. The inhabitants of Eupen and Malmedy found themselves trapped in a twilight existence, torn between the demands of the putative mother country (*mère patrie*) and the primordial and historical ties of the *Vaterland* to which they once belonged. By the mid-1930s, Belgium awoke to the need to reassert its authority over the new districts, but to many observers both inside and outside Belgian political circles, it seemed too little too late.⁵

³ Ibid; Pierre Van Werveke, *La Belgique et Eupen-Malmedy. Où en sommes-nous?* (Brussels: Les Éditions du Pays Belge, 1937), 12–13.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Pierre Maxence, *Les atouts gaspillés, ou le drame des Cantons de l'Est* (St. Niklaas, 1951), 37–39.

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