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## **The Phantom Storm: The crisis of 1848 and the stance of the Low Countries towards the danger of a Republican France.**

Lelij, Maarten

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# The Phantom Storm

The crisis of 1848 and the stance of the Low Countries towards the danger of a Republican France.



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<sup>1</sup> Félix Henri, Philippoteaux, 11-09-1884, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, *Petit Palais*.

# The Phantom Storm

The crisis of 1848 and the stance of the Low Countries towards the danger of a Republican France

By

Maarten Lely

s2333694

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University of Leiden

Dr. D. Bos

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## Introduction

On the 24th of February, 1848, the Belgian ambassador in London informed the English Foreign Minister Palmerston of the Belgian stance regarding the new developments in France. The ambassador told Palmerston that “a republican France was an aggressive and conquering France.”<sup>2</sup> The memories of the French Revolutionary Wars and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars were still fresh in Europe. Had it not been a French Republic that had threatened the European Balance of Power, subduing the existing states and creating puppet states across the continent? A French Republic that had turned on its rightful king and deposed him before trying to subjugate the lawful order in Europe? The same Republic that had turned into an imperial power under the guidance of Napoleon the likes of which had not been seen since the days of Rome?

The parallels to the events of 1789 had to have been frightening to the crowned heads of Europe and their governments. On the 24th, Frederick William IV of Prussia informed Victoria of Britain that he looked at France in fear of a new European war.<sup>3</sup> In the newly formed nation of Belgium, the news of the new French Revolution was met with dread in governmental circles.<sup>4</sup> In the Netherlands, the messages from the French capital of Paris were met with anticipation and uneasiness.<sup>5</sup> When Tsar Nicholas heard of the news he reacted calmly, but immediately stated that Russia would march to war if any infractions were made on existing treaties.<sup>6</sup> He also put a million more rubles at the disposal of the war ministry. Additionally, he wrote a letter to Victoria that a Russo-British union as discussed in 1844 may be needed to ensure stability in Europe.<sup>7</sup> The general consensus at the time among the leaders of European nations was that war was inevitable. France was militarily,

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<sup>2</sup> Van de Weyer to Leopold, Feb 27, 1848, CNB, I, 6-8. from Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, 26, King of Prussia to Victoria, Feb 27, 1848, LV II, 177-179.

<sup>4</sup> Bentinck to the Hague, 27 Feb, N.A, 2.05.01, 1470.

<sup>5</sup> Bentick to the duke of Randwijck, 6 Mar, idem.

<sup>6</sup> Nothomb to d'Hoffenschmidt, Mar. 14, 1848, AEB, Pr.IX from Gooch, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (1963), 50.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas to Victoria 22. Mar. -3 Apr, 1848, LV, II, 196.

by virtue of its population, still one of the most powerful nations on the continent and if it would lead to war, it would mean untold destruction in a display that would appear to be a replica of the events that had happened a little over three decades ago. In the Low Countries, the subject of this thesis, the consequences of the Belgian Revolution of 1830 were still felt strongly. The Belgian Revolution had broken out after the July Revolution in Paris, that had seen the Orleanist take-over of France. It seemed likely that this new French Revolution, a Republican Revolution this time, would also move beyond the borders of France into the Low Countries and bring about another time of violence and war in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Except history does not move in predictable patterns. Knowledge of the past does not make one a seer and although a war may have seemed inevitable, it was avoided nonetheless. The diplomatic crisis surrounding this new French Revolution however, is often downplayed in historical works, which have mostly focused on the spread of Revolution across the continent when discussing 1848. Yet, revolution and war were intrinsically linked at the time, especially if that revolution occurred in France. A Revolutionary France would mean a threat to European peace and the balance of power, but it was also a beacon for revolutionaries across the continent who felt supported by a Republican France that might come to their aid, militarily if need be. It may ultimately have been the case that no war in Europe erupted in 1848, but this does not mean that war had not loomed large over the governments of the Low Countries and Europe in general. A manifesto by the French Foreign minister of the Provisional Government Lamartine was sent to all the other courts of Europe one week after the initial Revolution in Paris. It had the intent of unlinking war and revolution (in France), because they were so intrinsically linked in the mind of the 19th century governments. The main objective of the manifesto was legitimising the rule of the Provisional Government and to make sure the reactionary powers would not see the new French Republic as an

existential threat.<sup>8</sup> The traumas of the French Revolutionary Wars were specifically addressed. If we consider Lamartine's manifesto and the Belgian ambassador's words, this parallel of revolution in France and war was very much on the minds of the contemporary players of the international game of diplomacy..

## Historiography

Modern historiography pays little attention to the link between revolution and war in the minds of the 19th century people and politicians. 1848 as the 'Year of Revolutions' is mostly described from a national perspective, or even on a smaller scale, like case studies on the cities of Vienna or Paris.<sup>9</sup> The threat of a European war is difficult to incorporate into a nation or city sized narrative. As written by Veit Valentin, who wrote a famous and ground-breaking history of the German Revolution of 1848 in 1931, the year 1848 marks a watershed moment in which nationalism and internationalism become 'contrary poles', which has influenced the way history has been written about the Year of Revolutions ever since. This thesis aims to provide a different angle on the events, inspired by Axel Körner's idea that nationalism and internationalism in 1848 had not yet become the 'contrary opposites' that Valentin described.<sup>10</sup> The June Uprisings in 1848 were as much about division on foreign policy as domestic, as Lamartine himself wrote in his review of the 1848 Revolution.<sup>11</sup> Both French and foreign historiography tend to focus on the domestic side of the conflict. This leaves the international elements to the 'Spring of Nations' of 1848 underdeveloped. The possibility of war and the foreign policy of the early Second Republic

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<sup>8</sup> de Lamartine, Alphonse, *Manifeste à l'Europe : [Circulaire du ministre des Affaires étrangères aux agents diplomatiques de la République française] / par Lamartine, 1848*, in <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56090467.textelimage> consulted on 09/05/2023. Also in D'Hoffenschmidt and Willmar, 1848, FOD (Buitenlandse Zaken België).

<sup>9</sup> Körner, Axel, *1848 - a European revolution? : international ideas and national memories of 1848* (Palgrave 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, 6.

<sup>11</sup> de Lamartine, Alphonse, *Histoire de La Révolution de 1848*. (Paris 1849). For a digital copy one may consult <https://archive.org/details/histoiredelarv01lama/page/n387/mode/2up?q=guerre>, last consulted on 09/05/2023.

seem to be largely omitted in most French histories on the events.<sup>12</sup> Even in a national history on diplomatic relations of Belgium, the international element to 1848 is mostly lost.<sup>13</sup>

In Dutch historiography, much has been written about the 'Miracle of 1848', in which William II turned from a 'Conservative to a Liberal' in one night.<sup>14</sup> The general consensus in Dutch literature is that William feared a revolution in the country he ruled. But what if the unrest in Europe and the Netherlands did not just bring about memories of the Place de la Revolution in 1792, where Louis XVI had lost his head? Maybe he also recalled French armies crossing the frozen Rhine in 1796, who went on to overthrow and dismantle the Dutch Republic. This interwovenness of domestic and foreign affairs seems to have escaped modern historiography.

Historiography in Belgium has traditionally mostly focused on the *Sonderweg* of Belgium as a frontier nation. Its neutrality is emphasised, which in and of itself is a stance towards foreign powers, and in that capacity transcends borders.<sup>15</sup> Belgium was declared a neutral country in 1839, which nationalistic historians in the 19th and 20th century sought to trace back to create a sense of national unity between the disparate Flemish and Walloons. They focused on the old *Barriere* system of the Peace of Westphalia, which had allowed the Dutch Republic to station troops in fortresses at the French border of the Spanish Low Countries against possible invaders from the south, whilst keeping the region under Spanish control. This created a remarkable position wherein not Belgians were the first to defend the country, but foreigners and Belgian historians drew upon that to show a 'neutral' national consciousness that had manifested itself in the Belgians into the modern era. If we take the

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<sup>12</sup> Stern, Daniel, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848*. (Paris 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Bitsch, Marie-Thérèse, and Girault, René, *La Belgique entre la France et l'Allemagne 1905-1914* (Paris 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Waling, Geerten, and Ottenheim, Niels, 'Waarom Nederland in 1848 geen revolutie kende.' *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 133.1 (2020): 5–29. Web.

<sup>15</sup> Descamps, Edouard, *La neutralité de la Belgique au point de vue historique, diplomatique, juridique et politique : étude sur la Constitution des États pacifiques à titre permanent*. (Brussels 1902), 4-15.



contemporary state of Belgian nationalism, we may conclude that their attempts at creating a singular national consciousness were not all that successful.<sup>16</sup> In 1848, this 'traditional neutrality' of the Belgian people was challenged for the first time since their independence by the mere existence of their big southern neighbour as a Republic. Many believed an uprising in Brussels would result in a union between Brussels and Paris, something that the other European powers would not allow.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to expectations, Belgian historiography on 1848 specifically mostly focuses on the lack of Revolutionary fervour in the Belgian cities and countryside, like its Dutch counterpart, but generally gives little consideration to the outside threat of French invasion and the diplomatic crisis surrounding it.<sup>18</sup>

In recent diplomatic historiography surrounding the crisis of 1848, the crisis and the fear of war surrounding the position of the Low Countries is scarcely mentioned. The focus lies mostly on Italy and the diplomatic crisis surrounding Lombardy. That is surprising as by the sources, it seems as if France annexing Belgium was much more likely until the 11th of March, than a war erupting in Lombardy.<sup>19</sup> In traditional diplomatic historiography on the subject of 1848, the remark is made that "diplomacy played only a secondary role during the years of 1848 and 1849 because every state was either in revolution or threatened by it." This thesis will combat that idea.<sup>20</sup>

A more military oriented historical approach made in the last decade surrounding the neutrality of the Western-European states of the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland in

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<sup>16</sup> Dhondt, Frederik, *La neutralité permanente de la Belgique et l'histoire du droit international : quelques jalons pour la recherche*, (2018).

<sup>17</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963),

<sup>18</sup> Although this has been described in Brison Gooch, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (1963), where the main drive of the book is the Belgian reactions to events happening in France. I will take a slightly more international stance, although Gooch also delves into this.

<sup>19</sup> Bridge, F. R, and Roger Bullen, *The great powers and the European states system 1814-1914* (Oxon 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Mowat, Robert, *A history of European diplomacy, 1815-1914*. (London 1927), 85.

the 19th century, does not mention the entire crisis at all, while it would have been very beneficial to the research.<sup>21</sup>

In general, historiography focuses on war or revolution, but rarely both.<sup>22</sup> If a more international approach is taken, it is mostly focused on the Labour or Communist movement of the 1848 Revolutions or the attempts for transnational cooperation between revolutionaries. A transnational approach towards the reaction of governments has seldom been done, especially on the fear of war.<sup>23</sup>

This thesis argues that it may actually be prudent to see revolution and war together. One leads to another in the minds of the actual actors in the 19th century. French citizens in a variety of European nations were repatriated out of fear that they may have sympathies, and therefore wanted to spread the new Revolution, which would lead to war.<sup>24</sup> Then there was also the case that Lamartine's manifesto mentioned the integrity and independence of Switzerland and Spain specifically, it did not mention Belgium at all, while it did state that France did not accept the Peace of Vienna, but saw it only as a base for further improvement.<sup>25</sup> This shows that at the time, the powers did not see diplomacy as secondary, but rather as complementary to domestic affairs. The diplomatic milieu right after the February Revolution focused so much on this crisis and the threat that this revolution would lead to war that both Prussia and Britain emphasised their commitment to uphold the Treaty of London of 1839, which guaranteed the borders in the Low Countries, by any means

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<sup>21</sup> Kaufmann, J. E & Kaufmann H. W, *The forts and fortifications of Europe 1815-1945: the neutral states: the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland*. (2014).

<sup>22</sup> See a variety of works, but as an example in this thesis: 'Dowe, Dieter, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jonathan Sperber, *Europe in 1848 Revolution and Reform*, (New York 2001).

<sup>23</sup> For a short summary on the work of Geerten Waling, see Smit, Christianne, 'Geerten Waling, 1848 Clubkoorts en revolutie. Democratische experimenten in Parijs en Berlijn', *Tijdschrift voor sociale en economische geschiedenis* 14 (2017). and Bos, Dennis, *Waarachtige Volksvrienden*, (Amsterdam, 2001), 30-39. For non-Dutch articles, see for example: Merk, Jan, Nationality Separates, Liberty Unites? The historical commemoration of 1848/49 in Baden, a European frontier Region. In Körner, Axel, *1848 - a European Revolution? : International Ideas and National Memories of 1848*. (Palgrave 2001), 185-208. or Breuilly, John, 1848: Connected or Comparable Revolutions. In *ibidem*, 31-49.

<sup>24</sup> Smit, Christianne, 'Geerten Waling, 1848 Clubkoorts en revolutie. Democratische experimenten in Parijs en Berlijn', *Tijdschrift voor sociale en economische geschiedenis* 14 (2017).

<sup>25</sup> de Lamartine, Alphonse, *Manifeste à l'Europe : [Circulaire du ministre des Affaires étrangères aux agents diplomatiques de la République française] / par Lamartine, 1848*, in <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56090467.textelimage> consulted on 09/05/2023. Also in D'Hoffenschmidt to Willmar, 1848, FOD (Buitenlandse Zaken België).

necessary.<sup>26</sup> If the Revolution or French armies would spill over into the Low Countries, Europe would go to war.

## Research question and legitimation

That takes us to the main question that will be answered in this thesis: How did the fear of war in the Low Countries influence international events surrounding the French Revolution of 1848 in February to April? In three chapters, we will chronologically follow the course of the crises. Herein we will also be looking at the importance of the Low Countries to European peace. Additionally, the link between war and revolution will be explored, especially within the diplomatic correspondence of the Low Countries. Another element that will be touched upon is the perceived threat from certain individuals who allegedly wanted war. The role of the kings of the Low Countries and the Great Powers on the diplomatic reaction of the Netherlands and Belgium will also play a role.

This thesis will take a transnational perspective, focused on the Low Countries, the Netherlands and Belgium, but with input from other European countries, mostly France, when appropriate. To explore the subject, we will be focusing on the initial days of the February Revolution and its initial reactions and developments into April. The three chapters will only extend that far as to limit the scope of the thesis. The first chapter will focus mostly on the initial fears and reactions on the status of the borders of the Low Countries after the February Revolution, until these fears mostly subsided in early March. The next chapter will focus on the diplomatic crisis surrounding the neutrality policy of Belgium and the threat that the France of the Provisional Government posed to the existence of Belgium until a few days after Belgium unofficially recognised the Provisional Government. The third chapter shall provide a more general overview to the reactions of the Dutch and Belgians towards the

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<sup>26</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 26-36.

crises of late March, bleeding into April. For example, the Risquons-Touts Crisis, when Belgian Revolutionaries invaded Belgium from French soil, and the Limburgian question will be treated. It will also attempt to connect unrest in Belgium and the Netherlands to the revolutionary developments and general instability in Europe, which may have possibly led to war and the fears surrounding those. The thesis will also examine the diplomatic policies of the Great Powers, including Prussia, France, and Great Britain, and to a lesser degree Austria and Russia, on the Low Countries.

## Methodology

In order to realise this thesis, extensive archival research has been done, mostly in the correspondence between the ministries of foreign affairs in the Netherlands and Belgium and their emissaries in Brussels and The Hague. Also taking a prominent place in the source material are the emissaries of both nations in Paris, London and, to a lesser extent, Berlin and Vienna. The internal reactions of the Belgian and Dutch governments to the news and developments surrounding the revolution in France is also researched. These internal reactions will originate mostly from ministerial council meetings. The news on Belgian council meetings does not come from the minutes of those meetings as Belgium only started keeping those after the First World War. Commentary by those present or rumours surrounding them in other sources will sadly have to suffice on that particular case. In these internal sources, it has been researched how revolution and war intertwined and how these subjects were discussed in (inter)-ministerial meetings and correspondence. The reactions and correspondence of the Ministries of the Interior and of War are the most important in this instance. The correspondence of the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, d'Hoffenschmidt is collected in a book by Alfred de Ridder, a 20<sup>th</sup> Century historian from Belgium. When I was in Brussels, I checked if de Ridder had incorporated the entire collection letters of the correspondents. Although I was not able to find all the correspondence, I was able to find the

letters of the Belgian ambassador to the Netherlands and these corresponded perfectly to those in the book, so I shall view the letters collected in that book as primary sources as well.

By using this corpus of sources, one should be able to create a general overview and systematic insight into the motivations and actions of the Dutch and Belgian governments during these hectic days. The weakness of this approach lies in the incomplete nature of archives, where some letters may have been lost, or have never been admitted. The Dutch National Archives does have a record on the 'Secret messages to the King' but as the index shows sadly many of these letters cannot be found in this specific archive and are therefore considered lost for this thesis. Another weakness is the power discrepancy between the correspondents, which may have led to a less detailed or altered narrative intended to please the recipient of the correspondence. Luckily, in the Dutch case, the Dutch emissary in Belgium had little notion of such formalities and kept a very detailed and continued analysis of the developments in Paris, even though that was beyond his jurisdiction, along with the reactions in Belgium towards those developments.<sup>27</sup>

Another weakness is the scope of the research. In actuality, the turmoil in 1848 does not stop after the 31st of March, but goes on, into April with the chaos of the Frankfurter Parliament in the German States and then into June, with the June Uprisings in France. To keep the research from being too ambitious, the decision has been made to keep the timeline loosely from the initial Revolution in Paris to the 31st of March, right after the Risquons-Touts Crisis. However, as to keep the stories that start in March complete, we will scarcely delve into the events in April.

There is a methodological problem with the transnational approach as well. The Netherlands are more connected to the events in Frankfurt and the rest of Germany as opposed to Paris.

I wanted to focus on the Revolution in Paris and the formation of the Second Republic and

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<sup>27</sup> Bentick to the duke of Randwijck, 3 Mar, N.A, 2.05.01, 1824. Brussel. Bentinck admits that the communication to Paris has been restored, but that he will nevertheless keep informing the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the developments in the French capital, from his deployment spot in Brussels.

the diplomatic crisis and fears that followed in the wake of that change in government in France. Therefore, the German link shall not be explored as much as could be done. Luckily, in March, the events in Frankfurt were, as of the opinion of the sources in 1848, still mostly connected to Paris. Therefore, I feel legitimised in not delving too much into the events in Germany, as that is a different, yet connected, subject and something fitting for a thesis on its own. The limiting factor in all of this is the fact that to the actors at the time, these events flowed into each other seamlessly, so the soft boundary at the end of March may feel arbitrary. Then again, the purpose of this thesis is not to sketch a general overview of the Low Countries' reaction to all the Revolutions in 1848, but just to the French Revolution in February.

Additionally, the transnational perspective in this thesis may result in the reversal of the traditional historiography; instead of a too domestic approach, the approach here may be too transnational, and against this bias a writer must remain vigilant.

# 1: The Danger in Unknowing

## The February Revolution

For the attentive contemporary observer in the 1840s, the kingdom of the Citizen King was not as stable as it tried to project outwardly. Grain riots had occurred as early as January 1847 in the city of Buzançais, which had seen the rioters squashed and three of the participants sentenced to death.<sup>28</sup> As it appeared, these were the death rows of a waning monarchy, which was unable to properly guide its citizens through the process of industrialisation.<sup>29</sup> General consensus at the time, however, was that Louis Phillipe's throne was quite secure. The Great Powers were more concerned with the internal politics of Switzerland, which had just experienced a short but domestically ground-breaking civil war, or the British policy of supporting Liberalism across the continent. The relationship between Britain and France was strained, which was escalated by the new British ambassador in Paris, who was actively and quite openly opposing the government in the French capital.<sup>30</sup> In Belgium, King Leopold expressed to Queen Victoria of Britain that "France has already been under water several times, what could be spoiled has been spoiled, what remains is pretty solid."<sup>31</sup> Sir Edward Blount, a British banker who was financing the early French railway system and who later helped Louis Phillipe and his family escape France during the Revolution, recalled that: "No throne in Europe was, to all outward appearances, more secure in 1847 than that of Louis Phillipe."<sup>32</sup> The greatest threat to peace in Europe was still seen as Jacobinism, which Woyna, the Austrian emissary in Belgium, blamed Palmerston of

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<sup>28</sup> Harsin Jill, Cynthia A. Bouton, *Interpreting Social Violence in French Culture: Buzançais, 1847-2008* by (review) *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, *The MIT Press Volume 43, Number 4, Spring* (2013), 623-624.

<sup>29</sup> Stern, Daniel, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848*. (Paris 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 16-17.

<sup>31</sup> Leopold to Victoria, Jan 15, LV, II, 138-139. In Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 16.

<sup>32</sup> Blount, Edward Charles; Reid, Stuart J, *Memoirs of Sir Edward Blount*, (New York 1902), 111.

spreading, and that had just achieved a victory in Switzerland, according to Leopold.<sup>33</sup> Even Lamartine, the later leading figure and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Second Republic, would have reacted with a sceptical smile upon hearing that a revolution would break out in France the following year.<sup>34</sup>

Domestically, the French Prime Minister Guizot was not accepting any criticism of the government's course of action, saying that "those who are not happy with the progress of the cabinet, can go through to the camp of the opposition."<sup>35</sup> Blinded by their own arrogance, the French government was slowly walking towards a cliff. Alexis de Tocqueville, a famous statesman and social scientists, compared Louis Philippe to "a man who refused to believe that his house was on fire, as he still held the keys in his pocket."<sup>36</sup>

France in actuality found itself in a variety of political, social and economic crises. The growing working class in the cities, and mostly Paris, was very poor. The rich lived in good conditions, whereas those belonging to the working class lived in squalor. The uncertainties of employment, the loosening of family and community ties due to urbanisation, and the massive gap between rich and poor created a socially unstable situation.<sup>37</sup>

Economically, the French state had been industrialising at a rapid pace ever since the July Revolution of 1830, mostly in the area of communication. However, there were also problems. Due to the marriage of the son of Louis Philippe to the heiress presumptive of the Spanish crown in 1846, the relationship between Britain and France had become cold, making it harder for France to draw in British money for its industrialisation.<sup>38</sup> In 1845-46, the

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<sup>33</sup> Woyna to Metternich, Dec. 6, 1847; and Leopold to Metternich, Dec. 31, 1847, AEV. in Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 17.

<sup>34</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Stern, Daniel, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848*. (Paris 1985), 18. "Ceux qui ne sont pas contents de la marche du cabinet", dit-il dans un débat relatif à une proposition de M. Duvergier de Hauranne sur l'abaissement du cens électoral, "peuvent passer dans le calme de l'opposition."

<sup>36</sup> Waling, Geerten, *1848: clubkoorts en revolutie. Democratische experimenten in Parijs en Berlijn*, (the Netherlands 2016), 49.

<sup>37</sup> Fortescue, William, *France and 1848: the end of monarchy*, (London 2005), 35.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*. 37.



French also experienced the effects from what in general history has gone down as the 'Potato Famine', where most of the potato yield was lost. In 1847, the total harvest was almost non-existent. Due to weather conditions, other crops also failed, which increased the prices of many other crops too, including wheat, which was politically sensitive. With bread and potatoes being expensive, any further disasters would be catastrophic for the poor.<sup>39</sup> Due to this, consumer investment in other necessities, like clothing, also plummeted. Although food prices fell again in 1847, the confidence in the industries did not return, resulting in widespread bankruptcies and loss of jobs. Similar events were taking place in England, which hindered the government in requiring foreign loans to stem the tide. The economic misery was complete.<sup>40</sup> This crisis in France and England also bled into other European countries, most prolifically Belgium, which was very reliant on the influx of English and French cash in its economy. Especially in the more urbanised Flanders, this led to the loss of work and economic uncertainty, alongside the disappearance of the traditional Flemish flax industry. The February Revolution and the economic response to that in Europe would only exacerbate this.<sup>41</sup> Falling standards of living, wage cuts and for a time the threat of famine, politically radicalised many workers.<sup>42</sup>

The French government had lost most of its moral authority and legitimacy, as they, the king, the rich and the grain merchants were mostly blamed for the crises of 1845-1848. Guizot's foreign policy was seen as unpatriotic and the July Revolution was more and more branded as a stolen Revolution by the Conservative Orleanists.<sup>43</sup> The Orleanists had made a Revolutionary name for themselves when they aligned with the forces of Liberalism in 1830 and when they had intervened in the Belgian Revolt. However, afterwards, the Orleanists

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<sup>39</sup> Ibidem. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 33.

<sup>42</sup> Fortescue, William, *France and 1848: the end of monarchy*, (London 2005), 40.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem 44.

state had turned repressive inwardly and stagnant outwardly.<sup>44</sup> In France, the memories of the great victories of Napoleon and the Republic were still alive and well and the people desired more of 'la grande nation.' They were not inherently opposed to war. France had stood by as the Austrians had incorporated the Cracovian Republic, the last remnants of a free Poland, into their empire, breaking their own prized Peace of Vienna. She had cooperated with the military dictatorship in Spain under Narvaez and had again sided with the Reactionary powers in late 1847, when Guizot supported the Sonderbund in the Swiss civil war, which was defeated by its Radical adversaries. Public opinion had been very much against these moves, as the populace saw France still as a protector of liberty and freedom across the continent and not as a power of Reaction.<sup>45</sup> Colonial success in Algeria was soured by the general cruelty displayed by French forces and thus could not alleviate any of the criticisms on the government.<sup>46</sup> The first accusation the opposition made towards the French government on the eve of the February Revolution was that the 'Ministry had betrayed the honour and the interests of France in foreign affairs.', showing the importance of glory in foreign affairs to the revolutionaries of 1848.<sup>47</sup> All this information is important to know because on the one hand it sketches a European problem that would ultimately lead to revolution in France. It also shows that the populace in France was not opposed to war, a fact probably well known by the crowned heads and their governments in the rest of Europe. A 1789 style of Revolution would certainly mean war in their minds.

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<sup>44</sup> Waling, Geerten, *1848: clubkoorts en revolutie. Democratische experimenten in Parijs en Berlijn*, (the Netherlands 2016), 49.

<sup>45</sup> Fortescue, William, *France and 1848: the end of monarchy*, (London 2005), 46-48.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Utrechtsche provinciale en stads-courant, nummer 24, 25-02-1848, uitgever L.e.Bosch, Utrecht, koninklijke bibliotheek c31, Delpher.  
[https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Frankrijk&page=8&sortfield=date&cql%5B%5D=%28date+\\_lte\\_+%2201-03-1848%22%29&cql%5B%5D=%28date+\\_lte\\_+%2220-06-1848%22%29&coll=ddd&redirect=true&identifier=ddd:010779066:mpeg21:a0018&resultsidentifier=ddd:010779066:mpeg21:a0018&rowid=6](https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Frankrijk&page=8&sortfield=date&cql%5B%5D=%28date+_lte_+%2201-03-1848%22%29&cql%5B%5D=%28date+_lte_+%2220-06-1848%22%29&coll=ddd&redirect=true&identifier=ddd:010779066:mpeg21:a0018&resultsidentifier=ddd:010779066:mpeg21:a0018&rowid=6). Consulted on 09/05/2023.

## Sailing dark

The powder-keg exploded in February 1848, when the government tried to outlaw a banquet held by the opposition.<sup>48</sup> In a span of three days, the Orleanist government was removed and a new Provisional Government took control.<sup>49</sup> The street fighting and violence in Paris, though interesting, are not necessary to describe in depth in this thesis. What is important for this thesis is that railway workers in Amiens, a nexus point in the communication and transportation lines in Northern France towards the Low Countries and Germany from St. Denis, cut the telegraph lines and destroyed the rails, shrouding all the affairs happening in Paris in mystery due to the lack of messages from the French capital.<sup>50</sup>

The Dutch envoy in Brussel, Baron Bentinck of Nijenhuis, was thus appointed by his government in The Hague as the person who was in the most favourable position to gather intelligence of the 'tidings from Paris.'<sup>51</sup> This was probably because he was closest by distance to Paris as opposed to the other envoys who were not in France. Bentinck was an Overijsselian diplomat who would later temporarily become minister of Foreign Affairs. In Belgium, the place of his stationing, he was not very well liked as he had little sympathy for the fledgling nation.<sup>52</sup> To guarantee that he would get news from Paris, Bentinck sent an unnamed somebody to Paris to send him letters of the situation there.<sup>53</sup>

The last message received from the Dutch envoy in Paris downplayed the events taking place in the French capital. On the 24th of February, Baron Fagel wrote: "*that nothing had happened yet that could be described as more than a little commotion. The attendees (to the riots) mostly consist of youthful youngsters who scream a lot but get only coldness in return*

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<sup>48</sup> van Zanten, Jeroen, *Koning Willem II : 1792-1849*. (Amsterdam 2013), 524.

<sup>49</sup> Stern, Daniel, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848*. (Paris 1985), 95-161.

<sup>50</sup> Bentinck to the Duke of Randwijck, 28 Feb., N.A, N 59. 2.05.01. 1470.

<sup>51</sup> Bentinck to the Duke of Randwijck, 25 Feb., N.A Indexnummer 7, ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> Mr. A.A. baron Bentinck van Nijenhuis, [https://www.parlement.com/id/vg09llisbfwh/a\\_a\\_baron\\_bentinck\\_van\\_nijenhuis](https://www.parlement.com/id/vg09llisbfwh/a_a_baron_bentinck_van_nijenhuis). Consulted on 09/05/2023.

<sup>53</sup> Bentinck to the Duke of Randwijck, 3 Mar. N.A N.66, , 2.05.01 1470.

*and who are easily dispersed by the numerous troops.*"<sup>54</sup> Summarising, Fagel appears to have a complete misunderstanding of the situation, also stating that there have been no wounded so far, or that the Revolution, or commotion to him, is nothing more than wantonness.<sup>55</sup> This reading of the situation is completely false if we take overviews of what actually happened.<sup>56</sup> His complete misjudgement of the situation can be attributed to two things. First of all, Fagel notes in the ending of his letter that a regiment of cavalry was stationed near his residence.<sup>57</sup> The Parisian troops were recruited directly from the *arrondissement* of the city itself and therefore represented the demographic makeup of the city. A cavalry regiment meant that these were rich men, who were thus keen to keep unrest and rioting far away.<sup>58</sup>

Secondly, Fagel's character was that of quite an arrogant aristocrat, if we read his letters analytically. In this very letter he downplays the entire state of affairs in Paris not just because he sees little of the action, but also because he thinks he knows better than the Parisian government and anti-rioting troops how to handle the situation.<sup>59</sup> His age at the time, Fagel was born in 1771, may have played a part in that. Fagel was however held in considerable esteem by the French as he had been the Dutch envoy for over 40 years in 1848 and he would continue to be the Dutch envoy in Paris until his death in 1856.<sup>60</sup>

The loss of communication would have, due to Fagel's last letter, likely come as a shock to the Dutch government, but little mind is paid to the situation in Paris in late February or early March, with the Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs making little mention of the developments

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<sup>54</sup> Fagel to the Duke of Randwijck, 24 Feb, Number 5, N.A, 2.05.01, 1470,.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>56</sup> Stern, Daniel, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848*. (Paris 1985).

<sup>57</sup> Fagel to the duke of Randwijck, 24 Feb, Number 5, N.A, 2.05.01, 1470, Enfin, de autoriteiten weten beter dan ik wat zij te doen hebben en de hoope veel nog heel beter. Maar ik herhaal het: de gevolgen van (..), hoe talrijk ook, hadden volstrekt geen gevaarlijk aanzien.

<sup>58</sup> Fortescue, William, *France and 1848: the end of monarchy*, (London 2005), 58.

<sup>59</sup> Fagel to the duke of Randwijck, 24 Feb, 2.05.01, 1470, Number 5.

<sup>60</sup> R. Baron Fagel, [https://www.parlement.com/id/vg09lls7xmzf/r\\_baron\\_fagel](https://www.parlement.com/id/vg09lls7xmzf/r_baron_fagel). Consulted on 09/05/2023.

in France in the Council of Ministers.<sup>61</sup> He did, however, according to the index, inform the king of most letters sent by Fagel or Bentinck.<sup>62</sup> The king then decided to call the Ministerial Council together. Randwijck was indeed very timid, but other ministers were more alarmed. The fears were not that the Parisian revolutionary fervour would spread to the Netherlands, but that the new French Republic would jeopardise the peace in Europe.<sup>63</sup> It is hard to discover what exactly transpired between the king and Randwijck, as I have found no letters regarding their correspondence. Randwijck comes across in the letters and historiography that I did have at my disposal as a strawman to the absolute politics of the Dutch king. The king would not have chosen a strong character, who may have acted out of his own accord, as a Minister of Foreign Affairs, so it seems likely that little sparring will have taken place. The Dutch king probably just dictated to his minister what should be done.

As shown by the quotes in the introduction of this thesis, Republicanism, and especially French Republicanism was very much tied to war. So was the house of Napoleon. It so happened that Napoleon's heir who, according to a variety of Dutch newspapers and even according to the Dutch secret agenda, arrived in France in the wake of the February Revolution. Strangely, no mention is made of this in the Belgian sources at all.<sup>64</sup> It may be these were just rumours that were taken for truth in the Netherlands, but it does show that the phantom of the war of the past still played an important part in the minds of the Dutch.

In the Dutch ministerial councils, that were held bi-daily during the recess of the Second Chamber, there were concerns regarding the blueprint of new concessions towards the Dutch public, that would develop into the Dutch constitution. This reform had been a long time coming but due to a variety of factors, mostly the king's unwillingness to give up his

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<sup>61</sup> Notulen Ministerraad, 29 Feb.-13 Mar, N.A, 2.02.05.02, 16-42, 91, 20.

<sup>62</sup> Indexen, Feb-Mar, 1848. N.A, 2.05.01.

<sup>63</sup> van Zanten, Jeroen, *Koning Willem II : 1792-1849*. (Amsterdam 2013), 524.

<sup>64</sup> Geheime agenda, februari, brief 21 en *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche courant : staats-,handels-,nieuws-en advertentieblad*, 01-03-1848, nummer 52, Rotterdam; *Dagblad van 's Gravenhage*, 01-03-1848, nummer 26, Den Haag en meer.

absolute power, it had been put on hold time and again. Because of the events in Paris, it was thought that these concessions may not be far reaching enough.<sup>65</sup> The main concern was, however, the developments regarding peace or war, with van Zuylen van Nijenvelt mentioning that Dutch safety was mainly dependent on Belgian neutrality.<sup>66</sup> The other attendees agreed with this, except for the Prince of Orange, who stated that it would be foolish to hide behind the backs of the Belgians and that general mobilisation was needed to combat the French threat.<sup>67</sup> After the council, Willem II spoke and he too agreed that a rapprochement with Brussels would be necessary.<sup>68</sup> This was the first step in the normalisation of relations between the two Low Countries. Willem's more erratic behaviour of the last two years seemed to have disappeared completely. As a soldier under fire, he seemed to feel the most comfortable.<sup>69</sup> It is obvious by these statements that the Netherlands were preparing for a French invasion of Belgium and subsequently of the southern Netherlands. In the Dutch newspaper *Utrechtsche provinciale en stads-courant* on the 1st of March, only the proclamations of the Provisional Government to the army are published, as that was apparently what held most people busy at the time.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, the foreign envoys abroad were still keeping tabs on the situation in Paris. Bentinck in particular was productive in these two months, sending letters to the minister of Foreign Affairs practically daily, and sometimes even multiple per day, even after the lines of communication were restored a couple days after they were cut. On the 26th, he writes that the Belgium government was taking precautions to ensure that whatever was happening in

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<sup>65</sup> van Zanten, Jeroen, *Koning Willem II : 1792-1849*. (Amsterdam 2013), 525.

<sup>66</sup> Notulen Ministerraad, 1848, N.A, 2.02.04, inv.nr. 4466.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>69</sup> van Zanten, Jeroen, *Koning Willem II : 1792-1849*. (Amsterdam 2013), 526.

<sup>70</sup> '*Utrechtsche provinciale en stads-courant*', nummer 24, 25-02-1848, uitgever L.e.Bosch, Utrecht, koninklijke bibliotheek c31, Delpher [https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Frankrijk&page=8&sortfield=date&cql%5B%5D=%28date+\\_gte\\_+%2201-03-1848%22%29&cql%5B%5D=%28date+\\_lte\\_+%2220-06-1848%22%29&coll=ddd&redirect=true&identifier=ddd:010779066:mpeg21:a0018&resultsidentifier=dd:010779066:mpeg21:a0018&rowid=6](https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Frankrijk&page=8&sortfield=date&cql%5B%5D=%28date+_gte_+%2201-03-1848%22%29&cql%5B%5D=%28date+_lte_+%2220-06-1848%22%29&coll=ddd&redirect=true&identifier=ddd:010779066:mpeg21:a0018&resultsidentifier=dd:010779066:mpeg21:a0018&rowid=6). Consulted on 09/05/2023.

Paris could not come to pass in Brussels.<sup>71</sup> Like Lamartine, he notes a certain brotherhood between Belgian and French communists and they would not oppose a Union. This first period of the Second French Republic, from 25 February to the end of June 1848, was characterised by a conflict between moderate republicans, who were de facto in power, and an extreme left. This Left consisted of socialist “intellectuals” and a portion of the “working classes” in the large cities and mostly in Paris.<sup>72</sup> Lamartine feared the more militant and expansionist Left would come into power, as this would lead undoubtedly to a general European war.<sup>73</sup> A war France could not hope to win. The Provisional Government had to beware of supporting European revolutions, as any conflict that France would be sucked into would play into the hands of extremists.<sup>74</sup>

To Bentinck, these struggles in Paris were no more than rumours at this point in time and he admits that.<sup>75</sup> However, on the 27th, Bentinck writes from Brussels that he now realises that what was happening in Paris was not an ordinary coup, but a Revolution.<sup>76</sup> Bentinck feared for peace in Europe, as he wondered, considering the affinity France and Belgium had enjoyed since the Belgian independence, what would happen if a union between France and Belgium were to pass. He wrote on the matter: “Whether there would be peace or war is contained in that question.”<sup>77</sup> Bentinck and the Dutch government were as of yet unbeknownst about Lamartine and his intentions. In reminiscence of 1789, what was happening in Paris could only be described as pure chaos by these outward observers. As by Bentinck’s letter, war hung in the air and Belgium was going to be the eye of the storm. Meanwhile, Bentinck writes that the Belgian government does not appear to be as

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<sup>71</sup> Bentinck to the Duke of Randwijck, N.A, 26 Feb, Letter 55, Gezantschap België en Luxemburg.

<sup>72</sup> Lévêque, Pierre, *The Revolutionary Crisis of 1848/51 in France: Origins and Course of Events*. In Dowe, Dieter, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jonathan Sperber, *Europe in 1848 Revolution and Reform*, (New York 2001).

<sup>73</sup> de Lamartine, Alphonse, *Histoire de La Révolution de 1848*. (Paris 1849). For a digital copy one may consult <https://archive.org/details/histoiredelarv01lama/page/n387/mode/2up?q=guerre>, last consulted on 09/05/2023.

<sup>74</sup> Lévêque, Pierre, *The Revolutionary Crisis of 1848/51 in France: Origins and Course of Events*. In Dowe, Dieter, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jonathan Sperber, *Europe in 1848 Revolution and Reform*, (New York 2001).

<sup>75</sup> Bentinck to the Duke of Randwijck, 26 Feb, N.A , Letter 55, Gezantschap België en Luxemburg.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem. 27 Feb, Letter 56.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem.

concerned about what was happening in Paris, as the main concerns of the government in the open council, where the stands were packed with curious bystanders, were about a loan they were going to take to fight the economic crisis that was holding the country in its grip.<sup>78</sup>

## Calamity

The Belgian government did actually share Bentinck's fears and was aware of the threat a Revolutionary, Jacobinesque France posed. The Belgian representative in Paris, de Prince de Ligne, sought to downplay alarming reports from France to his minister of Foreign Affairs, d'Hoffenschmidt, by emphasising the efforts of Lamartine's provisional government to restore order. He ominously added later however: "*I know that the dominant idea among the men of movement who have overthrown the July Monarchy is the union of Belgium with France.*"<sup>79</sup> Noted by historian Horst Lademacher, this was exactly the fear shared in Belgium and beyond. This is also visible the correspondence between Bentinck and Randwijck. It was also what was feared in Dutch newspapers.<sup>80</sup> A union of Belgium and France would be reminiscent but worse than the French intervention in the Belgian Revolution in 1830, which happened in the wake of the July Revolution,"thus leading to fundamental changes in the international constellation in Europe, it was now feared both at home and abroad that a similar development was in process."<sup>81</sup> Lamartine assured his Belgian colleague that conquest or moving beyond its own borders was not one of the objectives of the new Republic. d'Hoffenschmidt believed Lamartine to be sincere, but doubted the control the

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<sup>78</sup> Bentinck to the Duke of Randwijck, 27 Feb, N.A, 2.05.01 1606, Div.nrs. Ingekomen en minuten van uitgaande zeer geheime brieven, met de verbalen.

<sup>79</sup> Letter of de Lignes to d'Hoffschmidt of 26 February, *ibid.*, 26ff. Quote on 27, in Lademacher, Horst, 'The Netherlands and Belgium: Notes on the Causes of Abstinence from Revolution', *Europe in 1848* (2022), 272.

<sup>80</sup> 'Opregte Haarlemsche Courant', 01-03-1848, Haarlem, number 52 and <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Frankrijk&page=2&sortfield=date&cql%5B%5D=%28date+lte+%2201-03-1848%22%29&cql%5B%5D=%28date+lte+%2220-06-1848%22%29&coll=ddd&redirect=true&identifier=ddd:010519619:mpeg21:a0007&resultsidentifier=ddd:010519619:mpeg21:a0007&rowid=2>. Consulted on 09/05-2023. and Bentinck to the Duke of Randwijck Feb-Mar.

<sup>81</sup> Lademacher, Horst, 'The Netherlands and Belgium: Notes on the Causes of Abstinence from Revolution', *Europe in 1848* (2022), 272.



Frenchman had on the situation.<sup>82</sup> In Belgium, there were many in the government that doubted the dispositions of Lamartine and questioned d'Hoffenschmidt's calculation of the situation. They thought that the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs was maybe deluding himself.<sup>83</sup>

The existence of Belgium was a surrogate for the idea the Great Powers had envisioned for the Low Countries at the Peace of Vienna in 1815. The United Kingdom of the Netherlands had been an artificially created second rate Power, to deny Britain, France or Prussia respectively too much power in the region. However, with the independence of Belgium, a new variable was added to the equation of stability in that part of Europe. In the Treaty of London of 1839, the borders of the Low Countries had been drawn and guaranteed, as in 1815, but this Revolution in France threatened to again alter the situation in the Low Countries, in favour of France. After the Concert of Europe's failure to preserve the territorial integrity of the Netherlands, a union between Belgium and France would be a large blow to the prestige of the Great Powers. Another treaty would not be upheld if this would come to pass. Added to that, it would mean the territorial expansion of a republican France, which was the exact scenario the 1815 Peace of Vienna had sought to make an impossibility. This may have added to the militant response of Prussia and Britain to the alleged talks of Union between Belgium and France, which the Dutch and Belgian letters mention.<sup>84</sup> On the 28th, Lamartine guaranteed the British that France had no desire to annex Belgium, but the British only sent this in secret through van de Weyer, the Belgian emissary in Britain, to the Belgian king as open publication of the fact may weaken Lamartine's position. It was slowly becoming more apparent internationally that Lamartine was not the enemy to peace; that

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<sup>82</sup> De Ridder, Alfred, *La crise de la neutralité belge de 1848 : le dossier diplomatique*. I (Brussels 1928), XI.

<sup>83</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>84</sup> Letters to Randwijck from Belgium. Not clear from whom, judging by the handwriting probably Bentinck and an assistant, letters from 28 Feb and 8 Mar. Especially the British almost spastic reaction to the recognition of the provisional government.

was the French Left wing opposition.<sup>85</sup> The immediate fears for a war akin to the one that had started almost 60 years ago in 1789 were slowly subsiding, due to the manifestation of Lamartine as the strongman of the new government in Paris, who was openly in favour of peace. The situation is best characterised by an article in the Dutch newspaper *De Tijd*:

*“All the news that comes from France is, taking into account the circumstances, exceptionally beneficial. (...) The sense of defeat that the Parisian Revolution caused in Europe, and also the Netherlands, has hit anyone who has any heart for society painfully. And that is right, because the first news of the awful events gave immediate cause to fear for a European disasters out of which only doom would have followed. (..) But now the future has a much less dark tint.”*<sup>86</sup>

However, the Left had, in the view of the other European powers, a variety of voices in the Provisional Government opposed to Lamartine, like Ledru-Rollin.<sup>87</sup> French agents were also sent to the Rhine area to scout for a possible conquest, as per a report sent to d’Hoffenschmidt.<sup>88</sup> In a meeting of the Belgian Democratic Association in Brussels, a member named Spilthoorn stated that he would rather see the Belgian troops that were heading to the French border turn around and go to the Prussian border instead, to be the vanguard of the French Republic.<sup>89</sup> Spilthoorn also had contacts with a Dutch ‘Radical’ named van Bevervoorde and would be in contact with him discussing a possible Union

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<sup>85</sup> Van de Weyer to Leopold, 29 Feb, 1848, VWP, 116. In Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 38.

<sup>86</sup> *“De Tijd : godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad”*. 's-Hertogenbosch, 03-03-1848, Consulted on Delpher op 21-04-2023, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010929204:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>87</sup> Allison, John, and de Ridder, Alfred, La Crise de la Neutralité Belge de 1848: le Dossier Diplomatique, *The American Historical Review*, 35. (The Macmillan Company 1929), 109–110.

<sup>88</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963).

<sup>89</sup> *“Bredasche courant”*, 02-03-1848, Breda.

<https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?query=Frankrijk&page=5&sortfield=date&cql%5B%5D=%28date+lte+%2201-03-1848%22%29&cql%5B%5D=%28date+lte+%2220-06-1848%22%29&coll=ddd&redirect=true&identifier=ddd:010174348:mpeg21:a0003&resultsidentifier=dd:010174348:mpeg21:a0003&rowid=7>. Consulted on 09/05/2023.

between the Low Countries and the Rhineland.<sup>90</sup> This possibility was especially feared in Prussia. The king of Prussia believed that a Belgian Republic would cause a butterfly-effect that would first usher in a Rhenish Republic and then a German Republic. To avoid this course of events, he declared that, if Belgian neutrality was breached by France, he would act as if Belgium was part of the Prussian Rhinlands.<sup>91</sup>

## A dubious manifesto

In French nationalism, a France spanning from the Pyrenees to the Rhine was seen as a France within its natural borders.<sup>92</sup> The French had even once propositioned that they would enter into an alliance with Britain against Russia, if they would get the left bank of the Rhine in return. Additionally, it had been a French minister who had proposed the plan to dismantle Belgium and split it in four in 1838.<sup>93</sup>

As early as the 27th of February, Lamartine had made clear to the French foreign envoys that he was the new Minister of Foreign Affairs and that France was committed to the independence of nations and world peace.<sup>94</sup> A few days later, on the second of March, a public statement was released by Lamartine in which he attempted to detach Republicanism from war.<sup>95</sup> But this coincided with de Ligne noting that there was surprise within the Provisional Government due to the fact that no Republic had been proclaimed in Brussels

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<sup>90</sup> Robijns, Marinus, *Radicalen in Nederland*. (Leiden 1967), 262.

<sup>91</sup> De Ridder, Alfred, *Dix années de relations politiques entre le Belgique et les Pays Bays (9 avril 1839-1849)*. FOD.

<sup>92</sup> Ligne to d'Hoffenschmidt, Mar. 2, 1848, CNB, I, 54-56. In which he explains the idea of a fixed natural boundary for France. Additionally, from now on when I write CNB in the footnote, the letter comes from: De Ridder, Alfred, *La crise de la neutralité belge de 1848 : le dossier diplomatique*. I (Brussels 1928). which is a book consisting of a small introduction and then simply contains letters to and from d'Hoffenschmidt.

<sup>93</sup> De Ridder, Alfred, *La crise de la neutralité belge de 1848 : le dossier diplomatique*. I (Brussels 1928), VII.

<sup>94</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963).

<sup>95</sup> de Lamartine, Alphonse, *Manifeste à l'Europe : [Circulaire du ministre des Affaires étrangères aux agents diplomatiques de la République française] / par Lamartine, 1848*, in <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56090467.textelimage> consulted on 09/05/2023.

yet.<sup>96</sup> The only way Belgium might avoid invasion was to have closer ties with Prussia and Britain, according to de Ligne.<sup>97</sup> However, for that it would need to let go of its neutral policy, which would not be accepted by France, probably not even by Lamartine. If Lamartine allowed such a course of action by Belgium, he may have lost control of the domestic situation in France, with the people having been denied their will in foreign policy since the early days of the July monarchy. His fall would have led to war either way.

During this troubling situation, Lamartine released a manifesto to all governments in Europe called '*A l'Europe*.' It may have had the goal of taking some tension out of the air, but in this the manifesto failed. It even resulted in Lamartine losing much of his credibility that he had built up in the last couple of days. Briefly, the manifesto stated that France accepted the 1815 Peace as a base for modification, defending that by saying that modification (of that peace) was something that the other Great Powers did all the time.<sup>98</sup> He did nuance this by saying that the only true freedom can be achieved from one's own soil, but that did little to change the overall sentiment towards the manifesto.<sup>99</sup> With this manifesto, Lamartine managed to antagonise all other Great Powers. Britain started taking a more militant approach to the new republic and Austria even saw the manifesto as a declaration of war. De Ligne noted that if this manifesto was shared by an official government, as opposed to a provisional one, war would have surely followed.<sup>100</sup> The problem with Lamartine's manifesto was that it tried to please two sides that are diagonally opposed. On the one hand, he appealed to the Reactionary powers of Europe by untying revolution and republicanism in France from war. On the other hand he tried to appeal to people in his own country who would like to see a more militant and active foreign policy than under the previous Orleanist government. With this manifesto, he succeeded at pleasing neither, as he was too

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<sup>96</sup> Ligne to d'Hoffenschmidt, Mar. 2, 1848, CNB, I, 54-56.

<sup>97</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>98</sup> de Lamartine, Alphonse, *Manifeste à l'Europe : [Circulaire du ministre des Affaires étrangères aux agents diplomatiques de la République française] / par Lamartine, 1848*, in <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56090467.textelimage> consulted on 09/05/2023.

<sup>99</sup> Ibidem, 14.

<sup>100</sup> De Ligne to d'Hoffenschmidt, CNB, N67, 100.

inconsiderate of the foreign feelings towards an even slightly militant republic in France. This paradox Lamartine was fighting is encapsulated in the words of the Belgian ambassador to the Netherlands' on Lamartine:

*"The flag he is hoisting is one of conquest, but the man hoisting it is one of peace."*<sup>101</sup>

Belgium was specifically not mentioned by Lamartine among the countries that France did not seek war with.<sup>102</sup> It seems that that was intentional, with the Left wing opposition and people apparently very much in favour of a French invasion of its youngest neighbour. In his message to Europe, he did untangle the Republic of 1848 from the one created in 1792 explicitly, while trying not to devalue the acts of the people in 1792. He stated that the First Republic became as violent as it did because the revolution was stolen from the people by oligarchs with malicious intent, which must be noted is fairly ironic, as he was a moderate who was also stealing the revolution. However, Lamartine was a pacifist, who was trying to make sure that a repeat of 1789 would not come to pass. He stated that "(..)the people and peace are the same word."<sup>103</sup> His foreign policy can further be defined by the next quote:

*"It is not the goal to light the world on fire; it is to shine from its place on the horizon of peoples to get ahead of them and guide them at the same time."*<sup>104</sup>

Nonetheless, Europe still feared, at this point mostly for Belgium. Lamartine may not have wanted war, but there were plenty of people in France who sought to see him fall and move to war anyway. This is why Lamartine was necessitated to use more militant language than he may have preferred himself. In the next chapter, we will delve into the end of this crisis

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<sup>101</sup> Willmar to d'Hoffenschmidt, 4 Mar, 1848, FOD (Archief Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken België).

<sup>102</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine, *Manifeste à l'Europe : [Circulaire du ministre des Affaires étrangères aux agents diplomatiques de la République française] / par Lamartine, 1848* in <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56090467.textelimage> consulted on 09/05/2023.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem, 8. Le peuple et la paix, c'est un même mot.

<sup>104</sup> Ibidem. Ce n'est point là incendier le monde, c'est briller de sa place sur l'horizon des peuples pour les devancer et les guider à la fois.

and the manifestation of the Provisional Government, which was now firmly in control of the diplomatic channels of France towards foreign powers. The fears of war were changing.

## 2: Unrecognisable recognition and instability

### Diplomacy

When the Second Republic was proclaimed, there was no international recognition of this act nor were there any governments that actively supported the new Republic. As far as the other governments in Europe were concerned, the July monarchy of Louis Philippe was still *de jure* in power, making the proclamation an illegal act of rebellion. For the Second Republic it was important to be recognised as the legitimate French government because that would also legitimise their rule domestically.<sup>105</sup> The Reactionary Powers of Europe were however not inclined to do so at all. Prussia, Austria and Russia especially were very hostile towards that idea, as they rather saw a monarchy return to stabilise France. Britain started the crisis as being firmly opposed to a French Republic, moved towards a more begrudgingly indifferent policy and then, after Lamartine's failed attempt at disconnecting a French Republic from war, back in the more militant camp. As long as the Republican regime was not recognised elsewhere in Europe, there was a real threat of intervention by foreign powers. Russia actively pursued this policy, and was supported by Austria and Prussia. To ensure victory, they wanted Britain to stand by their side and she was not interested in an unprovoked European war.<sup>106</sup> Britain felt that this war would only benefit a radical Republic, as the entire population of France would be pushed into their arms and was therefore reluctant to join the other Great Powers. Thus she blocked the entrance of Russian troops into Prussia.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Stern, Daniel, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848*. (Paris 1985).

<sup>106</sup> De Weyer to D'Hoffenschmidt, CNB, N.50, 70.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*.

Belgium was afraid of this particular turn of events, because it would be crushed in the case of aggression by the Holy Alliance as well.<sup>108</sup> It had been on the verge of opening up unofficial diplomatic channels with the Provisional Government, but was now being hindered by the Great powers of doing so.<sup>109</sup>

Belgium mobilised partially and this was met with suspicion in France. It was seen as evidence of a possible invasion by the reactionary powers. Belgium ensured France that it only mobilised to dissuade an attack from outside, which was true, as the Belgian government realised that it would be hopeless to fight France in a defensive war, let alone an offensive one. Although Belgium had to follow a policy of armed neutrality strong enough to dissuade any attacker, prior to 1848, it had mainly leaned on France for its defence. This policy was now backfiring. The only way Britain and Austria thought Belgium was to stand a chance was to allow Prussian troops to come in and fight off the French.<sup>110</sup>

Secretly, Belgium had asked Prussia to move its army to the area between Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne. This had to be done in secret so as to not compromise Belgian neutrality. If Belgium were to enter into official treaties of alliance with Prussia, Britain, and the Netherlands, it would nullify the 1839 treaty and potentially antagonise France, which may provoke an attack<sup>111</sup> Because of this, Woyna, the Austrian emissary in Belgium, sent a message to Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor, to advise him to ask Prussia to station troops at the eastern Belgian border.<sup>112</sup> This was done in response to the seven French regiments that were sent to the Belgian border.<sup>113</sup> France ensured Belgium that this was only done to pacify the more militant elements of the army and to satisfy them, while meanwhile keeping an eye on the troop movement of the Holy Alliance.<sup>114</sup> Belgium responded that they were happy with the friendship of France, but that it also sought freedom under its own

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<sup>108</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>109</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt to the Belgian delegations, Mar. 5, CNB, N74.

<sup>110</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963),

<sup>111</sup> Ibidem, 19, 37 and 44.

<sup>112</sup> Woyna to Metternich, Feb. 27, 1848, AEV. in Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 19.

<sup>113</sup> Houry to d'Hoffenschmidt, Mar. 1, N.75 CNB, I, 41.

<sup>114</sup> Ibidem.



institutions.<sup>115</sup> As shown, the fears for a war had moved away from the chaotic reflexes of late February and the early March days to a more elaborate, diplomatic crisis.

As this was taking place, the Dutch wanted to move troops to the fortress of Breda, in order to prepare for the possibility of a French attack from the south in case of a French invasion of Belgium, but were informed by the Belgian ambassador Willmar that Belgium would be forced to send troops to observe these troop movements, to uphold its policy of neutrality. This would strain the Belgian defences in the south. The Dutch government took this into consideration and ultimately decided to cancel the plans on March 2nd, being also pressured by the British to cooperate.<sup>116</sup> The Belgians did not trust the Dutch. Belgo-Dutch relations had never quite normalised after 1839. When visiting Dutch Limburg in 1841, king Willem II had hinted at a quick reunification of the Netherlands and Belgium. The original base for Belgian neutrality was to oppose Dutch aggression; not French. And as late as 1841 had the Dutch king hinted on the possibility of an Orangist counterrevolution with him at its head.<sup>117</sup> In 1848, when fears of revolution were widespread in Belgium, Willmar even wrote that the Dutch government had sent agents into Flanders to incite an insurrection, although no proof has been found for this in the Dutch National Archive, it nonetheless shows how much the two countries distrusted each other.<sup>118</sup> Willmar claimed in his letter that he heard these things from army officers and people in the palace, but a note must be made on Willmar: he was the personification of the distrust existing between the two nations. He often sent banal palace gossip to d'Hoffenschmidt as genuine insights in Dutch royal or governmental politics

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<sup>115</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>116</sup> Willmar to d'Hoffenschmidt, Feb. 29, 1848, CNB, I, 23-24.

<sup>117</sup> Koch, Jeroen, De Belgische Opstand en het Belgische orangisme. *Historiek: online geschiedenis magazine*. (2022). <https://historiek.net/oranje-en-de-belgische-kwestie-1832/76018/>. Last consulted on 10/05/2023.

<sup>118</sup> Allison, John, and de Ridder, Alfred, La Crise de la Neutralité Belge de 1848: le Dossier Diplomatique, *The American Historical Review*, 35. (The Macmillan Company 1929) And N.A. Buitenlandse Zaken en de Geheime Vergaderingen.

and he was generally distrustful of any statement the Dutch government made on Belgium, to the degree of being unreasonable sometimes.<sup>119</sup>

It is likely that Prussian protection was preferred by Belgium over Dutch protection in the case of a war with France, but the Dutch government spontaneously guaranteed Belgian independence on March 2nd anyway.<sup>120</sup> The reasons for this are hard to uncover. The Netherlands were under strong Prussian influence at the time, so it is possible that they were pressured by Prussia to do so.<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, the Netherlands feared Prussia more than it feared France. Prussia was involved to a high degree in the Danish succession crisis surrounding the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, which were formally part of the German Confederation, but were ruled by the king of Denmark. The Netherlands was in a politically similar situation with Prussia, due to the Dutch regions of Limburg and Luxemburg, which were also part of the German Confederation but were ruled by the Dutch king. Limburg also had an active independence movement that sought for Limburg to either join Belgium or Prussia. Doing a qualitative analysis of the source material of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the amount of diplomatic discourse on Prussia and the discourse the department had with the Ministry of War on the tracking of Prussian troops and of other states in the bordering members of the German Confederation was substantially larger than the amount of Dutch sources on the Revolution in France.<sup>122</sup>

The Dutch move to guarantee Belgium may have had the aim as to not be completely surrounded by Prussian aligned states, which was likely to happen if Belgium were to be saved by Prussia alone, replacing France as Belgium's main protector. A Dutch intervention would draw Belgium closer to the Netherlands again, which had been William II's objective

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<sup>119</sup> Willmar to d'Hoffenschmidt, 1848, FOD, general correspondence from 1848, as by his 164 letters between February and the first of April and his letters in the CNB.

<sup>120</sup> Woyna to Metternich, Mar. 3, 1848, AEV. from Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963).

<sup>121</sup> On the Netherlands being under Prussian influence in 1848, see van Zanten, Jeroen, *Koning Willem II: 1792-1849*. (Amsterdam 2013). and Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963).

<sup>122</sup> Indexen, Feb-Mar, 1848. N.A, 2.05.01.

ever since the Belgian Revolt, and it would deny Prussian influence in the country.<sup>123</sup> This may have forced the Dutch to play a more proactive role than initially anticipated by other powers. The region of Limburg also directly tied the fate of Belgium to the Netherlands, as unrest in Belgium would almost certainly cross the border into Dutch Limburg and possibly North-Brabant.

The Dutch King, performing his own private diplomacy, stated that he would '*marcher d'accord*' with Belgium and sent a letter to Leopold to provide him with moral and military aid if need be, which was met with great optimism from Leopold. In this letter, he expressed his intention to create a 'physical protection' to the threat to both his and Leopold's crowns in the case of war.<sup>124</sup> This shows a genuine fear to be removed from his throne by the French in a war. William was planning on concentrating most of the Dutch troops in North-Brabant, in spite of Lamartine's reassurances which he had transmitted to Fagel that the French Republic was not looking for war with the Netherlands on the 28th.<sup>125</sup> On the 5th of March, William ordered the Prussian envoy, von Koenigsmarck, to write to Berlin to create a military alliance. He also requested the formation of an army, in which he would lead the Belgo-Dutch left flank and on the 12th he got an answer, that was not dismissive.<sup>126</sup> Relations with Belgium were improving and talks of creating a formal defensive alliance between the two countries were underway, which would be a break in the Belgian neutrality policy.<sup>127</sup>

This policy of neutrality was Belgium's biggest protection at this point in time, but it also rendered the country inflexible at dealing with changes in the diplomatic arena. On the one hand, its position provided it with an abundance of allies, even the old nemesis of the

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<sup>123</sup> van Zanten, Jeroen, *Koning Willem II : 1792-1849*. (Amsterdam 2013), Chapter 12.

<sup>124</sup> William to Leopold, letter taken from De Ridder, Alfred, *Dix années de relations politiques entre le Belgique et les Pays Bays (9 avril 1839-1849)*. FOD.

<sup>125</sup> Fagel to the duke of Randwijck, 28 Feb, 1848, N.A, 2.05.01.

<sup>126</sup> Alberts, Adriaan, *Koning Willem II* (The Hague 1964), 63-64.

<sup>127</sup> Willmar to d'Hoffenschmidt, 8-9 March, N.55, FOD. (I must admit I made a mistake with the dating of this letter in my research file, but as the next letter, N 56, is written on the 9th, we can be safely assume it is either one of these dates.)

Netherlands was coming to Belgian aid in case of a war with France. On the other hand, it left Belgium almost completely without a chance to follow its own path in diplomacy because it was so reliant on other Powers for its own national security. If Belgium would in any case break its vow of neutrality, especially concerning France, it was feared that France would invade, no matter how pacifistic the Second Republic claimed to be.

## Unravelling

However, the developments in Germany were undermining the organised reactionary response to the Second Republic. News of the Revolution in Paris had led to a revolution in Baden on the 1st of March. Soon most of the German states would be facing revolutionary uprisings and on March 6th the unrest would reach Prussia.<sup>128</sup> The news that many German rulers were now reforming the country as opposed to the Netherlands led to unrest in Rotterdam and Amsterdam.<sup>129</sup> The Speaker to the Dutch house of Representatives cried out that 'Asmodeus would chase the House away' after demonstrations in the Hague.<sup>130</sup> German labourers tried to start a revolutionary movement in the Netherlands, but failed.<sup>131</sup>

Nonetheless, the situation in the Netherlands was getting more unstable and the government's unwillingness to actually reform played an important part in this. In the capital, pamphlets were found everywhere, proclaiming a perspicuous message:

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<sup>128</sup> van Zanten, Jeroen, *Koning Willem II : 1792-1849*. (Amsterdam 2013), 528.

<sup>129</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>130</sup> Waling, Geerten, *1848: clubkoorts en revolutie. Democratische experimenten in Parijs en Berlijn*, (the Netherlands 2016), 72. By Asmodeus he means either revolutionaries, or maybe the French.

<sup>131</sup> Robijns, Marinus, *Radicalen in Nederland*. (Leiden 1967), 215.

*“Long live the Republic! Away with the King, the Ministers and the General-Estates! They are leeches, who will suck the marrow from the people’s bones. Long live the Republic!”*<sup>132</sup>

A couple days after the pamphlets and influenced by the speaker of the ministers, his daughter, who lived in Weimar, and the chief of police, William went from a Conservative to a Liberal in one night and a Dutch constitution would be created.<sup>133</sup> The Dutch Radical van Bevervoorde also claimed to have influenced the king, but it seems more likely that the king was afraid of his country erupting into revolution due to the messages from Germany.<sup>134</sup> This reading of the influence the Radical had is further reinforced by the fact that van Bevervoorde’s meeting with the king was prior to William’s letter to Berlin, in which he had asked for an alliance and an army.<sup>135</sup> As the situation in Germany developed, the attention of the Netherlands and the rest of Europe became divided between the revolutionary movements there and the one in France, as any wrong movements in either could threaten peace in Europe.

As shown, its policy of neutrality was Belgium’s biggest protection at this point in time, but it also rendered the country inflexible at dealing with changes in the diplomatic arena. She had to passively endure many actions that other countries inflicted on her.

The French ambassador in Brussels, Marie-Hippolyte de Gueulluy, had retired after the fall of the July Monarchy, leaving a vacant position in Belgium for a French official. Lamartine sent a spokesman for the Provisional Government: Sérurier. This was diplomatically not as volatile, as he functioned simply as a representative of the Provisional Government, and not of France. These relations were unofficial and this distinction is very important at this point in time. He noted to Lamartine that there was little sympathy for a union with France in Belgium

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<sup>132</sup> Ibidem en ‘Geheime ingekomen en minuten van uitgegane stukken, maart 1848’, N.A 2.09.01, inv.nr 4671. “Leve de Republiek! Weg met den koning, de ministers en de Staten-Generaal! Het zijn bloedzuigers, die het volk het merg uit de beenderen zuigen. Leve de Republiek!”

<sup>133</sup> van Zanten, Jeroen, *Koning Willem II : 1792-1849*. (Amsterdam 2013), 530-34.

<sup>134</sup> Robijns, Marinus, *Radicalen in Nederland*. (Leiden 1967), 246.

<sup>135</sup> Ibidem.

except from some radicals. Sérurier also noted his efforts to reduce the activities and enthusiasm of some French propagandists, who were crossing into Belgium outside of the control of the Provisional Government and were starting to become a problem for Belgium. But in general, there was no reason for Lamartine to fear any sudden changes in Belgium that would lead to war.<sup>136</sup> Belgium was thus one of the first countries to unofficially recognise the Republic, because, as Woyna put it, a failure to host a French Republican ambassador would be akin to declaring war.<sup>137</sup> Belgium therefore could not walk the middle road that many European countries did in this crisis. But on the other hand, recognition of the Republic would be an act that may be interpreted as a breaking of its pact of neutrality by the very Powers that were protecting it from the country it would have entered diplomatic relations with.

To figure out if Belgium intended to follow these unofficial relations up with a quick recognition of the Second Republic, Woyna simply asked d'Hoffenschmidt if Belgium intended to recognise the Provisional Government, after the acceptance of Sérurier.<sup>138</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt initially reacted defensively to this, stating that "Belgium's political dependence was not a condition of its neutrality." Woyna soothed (or threatened) him by reassuring the virtues of transnational cooperation and that the courts of Vienna, London, Berlin and St.Petersburg had great influence and that it was only reasonable for the guarantors of Belgian neutrality to know the intentions of the country they were guaranteeing. Ultimately, it became clear to him that Belgium was only going to have unofficial relations with the Provisional Government and would wait to recognise the Republic.<sup>139</sup> Bentinck expected the Belgian government to recognise the Provisional Government as early as March 8, days prior to Woyna's conversation with d'Hoffenschmidt.,

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<sup>136</sup> Sérurier to Lamartine, Mar. 17, 1848, AEF, Belg., XXX. in Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 33.

<sup>137</sup> Woyna to Metternich, Feb. 27, 1848 AEF. in Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 44.

<sup>138</sup> There is an important distinction between recognition of the Provisional Government and the Republic. Belgium would wait for the definitive settling of the situation in France before recognising the Second Republic.

<sup>139</sup> Woyna to Metternich, Mar.8, 1848, AEF. In Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963).

He had heard from people present at the (Belgian) Council of Ministers that they would do this because they allegedly wanted to 'move on from where they left off.'<sup>140</sup> This is not unsurprising, as d'Hoffenschmidt had also reiterated Belgian commercial and labour interests in France.<sup>141</sup> Sérurier's sincere help of combating French propagandists in Belgium also helped to win the trust of the Belgian government in Lamartine's and the Provisional Government again.<sup>142</sup> Relations between the Provisional Government, Belgium and the other European Powers, were normalising and war with France under the Provisional Government was moving into the realm of impossibility, even though this was not known for sure at the time. The Great Powers believed a war in Italy to be much more likely and Britain was unwilling to guarantee the borders there.<sup>143</sup> With the changing situation in Germany, the threat of war would quickly move from Lombardy to the plains of Poland.

Belgium, nonetheless, seemed to be alarmed by its reliance on foreign powers to survive crises and adopted a more militant neutrality, so it may defend itself better in the future should she be threatened, something that would save the country half a century later when the Germans invaded in 1914. This more militant approach to neutrality did not stop the surrounding countries from adopting patronising views on the neutral Belgians, as the Second Empire and the Prussians/Germans show.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Bentinck to the Duke of Randwijck, Mar. 5, 1848, N.A. It is impossible to verify his claim as the Belgian Council of Ministers only started to keep minutes during the course of World War One.

<sup>141</sup> Woyna to Metternich, Mar.8, 1848 AEV. In Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963).

<sup>142</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt to de Ligne, Brussel, 21 Mar, N.164. ANB

<sup>143</sup> De Weyer to d'Hoffenschmidt, London, 11 Mar, N.127. ANB.

<sup>144</sup> Dentu, E., *La Neutralité belge et les crises européennes* (Paris 1859).

### 3: An unstable Europe

#### Uncertain borders

Contrary to expectations, it was actually the more industrialised Flemish regions that had a limited interest in a union with France, as opposed to the Walloon/French speaking Wallonia. Even in the city of Mariembourg, which was very Francophile as they took great pride in their contribution to the Grande Armée of Napoleon 30 years earlier, it remained calm, which had not been expected by the Belgian government<sup>145</sup> Due to the economic crisis of 1847, many workers in the more industrialised Flanders were without work. The unemployment and unrest was increasing due to the events taking place in Paris, to which the financial markets reacted negatively. On the 12th of March, some of the unemployed in Bruges were saying that there would be more work if Belgium were to be part of France.<sup>146</sup> In Paris, Belgian workers were being harassed and fired, which made them want to return their country of origin. But generally, it remained more calm in Belgium than in the Netherlands, mostly because Belgium was less connected to the happenings in Germany.

The attention of the Dutch was moving away from the developments in France and Belgium at this point as the threat from Germany was seen as a much bigger problem, especially with the province of Limburg attempting to secede. Baron Steels, who had fought alongside the Belgians during the Belgian Revolt, was now trying to join a united German Confederation.<sup>147</sup> But the situation in Limburg was still closely tied to Belgium as well. Limburgian regionalism at the time bordered on nationalism, but it was split in three, with a part of the Limburgians wanting to remain Dutch, a part wanting to join Belgium and a final part seeking to join

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<sup>145</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 56.

<sup>146</sup> Ibidem, 64.

<sup>147</sup> Gemeentearchief Roermond, Baron streed voor Limburgs vrijheid, <https://www.archiefroermond.nl/nl/roermonds-verleden/verhalen/sjambas-blog/baron-streed-voor-limburgs-vrijheid>. Consulted on 10/05/2023.



Prussia/Germany. Trouble broke out in Maastricht and in Thorn shots were exchanged between the police and the citizenry. At Eysden, the Prussian flag flew briefly until a gendarmerie unit from Maastricht took it down. Belgian troops patrolling the border heard songs requesting a union with Belgium. From Maastricht, people went down to Cologne to ask for Prussian annexation.<sup>148</sup> This situation was dangerous as any alteration of the borders of the Low Countries without approval from all signatories of the 1839 treaty could mean war.

In Roermond, a clash took place between police and factory workers when a Belgian worker was arrested under the suspicion of attempting to bring the Revolution to the Netherlands. It never came to open rebellion in favour of independence, but the Dutch government did release pamphlets in the area stating that authority in Limburg belonged to the Netherlands and the Netherlands alone.<sup>149</sup> The situation would further develop alongside the events in Germany, happening mostly in April and May, which I will quickly summarise as to not cut the story short, although it does technically take place after the methodological timeframe of this thesis.

The leader of the Limburgian separatists, Jan Lodewijk baron van Scherpenzeel Heusch, who had fought alongside the Belgians during the Belgian War of Independence, went to Frankfurt to take his seat as member of parliament in the Reichstag of Frankfurt. This was after his Independence Party easily won the elections in the province for the representatives to the Parliament. His greatest triumph was when the Parliament voted in favour of Limburgian independence from the Netherlands. A few days later, the quest for Limburgish independence (in 1848) would come to an abrupt end with the crushing of the Frankfurterian parliament by Prussian troops.<sup>150</sup> The case of Limburg serves to prove that perceived

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<sup>148</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 60.

<sup>149</sup> Publicatie: de gouverneur van het hertogdom Limburg aan de ingezetenen autoriteiten van dat Gewest geschreven door de gouverneur van het hertogdom Limburg E. van Meeuwen gedrukt bij Rudy Lefebvre drukke van het bestuur van Limburg langs het Vrijthof nummer 175 te Maastricht, From 'Bijlagen van de Ministerraad', March, 1848, N.A., 2.02.05.02.

<sup>150</sup> Gemeentearchief Roermond, Baron streed voor Limburgs vrijheid, <https://www.archiefroermond.nl/nl/roermonds-verleden/verhalen/sjambas-blog/baron-streed-voor-limburgs-vrijheid>. Consulted on 10/05/2023.

instability had consequences in the frontier regions of the Low Countries and these movements, when left to their devices, could jeopardise the 1839 treaty. A possible voluntary secession from Limburg was also seriously discussed in this regard in the ministerial council of the Netherlands.<sup>151</sup> The Dutch government may not have been willing to wage a war with Germany, to keep onto the region, but I have not found this in the sources. In the press however, if they can be taken as a good grade for Dutch public opinion, Limburg was called "A miserable stretch of dirt, an excess of our country that digests our best juices."<sup>152</sup> To summarise: not worth fighting for. The Dutch decided to ultimately keep onto Limburg, probably fearing that secession would lead to war, if not with Prussia, then with France or Belgium. The region would continue to strain German-Dutch relations until it was finally turned into a proper Dutch province as the German Confederation ceased to exist due to conflict between Austria and Prussia surrounding the Brother War.

Belgium also suffered secessionist or expansionist movements, mainly in Belgian Luxemburg, where people either sought reunification with the Grand Duchy, still ruled over by the Dutch king, but many more sought the incorporation of the entirety of Luxemburg into Belgium. This part of Belgium was way more connected to Germany by its geography and its bond with the Grand Duchy right across the border.<sup>153</sup> Within Luxemburg, there were serious agitations for a republic and joining the two existing Luxemburgs together, either within Belgium, or as a joined separate nation.<sup>154</sup> An expansion or shrinkage of Belgian territory

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<sup>151</sup> Notulen ministerraad, Mar, 1848. N.A, 2.02.05.02. It should be noted that most talks in the Netherlands on Limburg were done in April as opposed to March. The line of policy they ultimately decided on was to try to detach Limburg from the German Confederation. For this: see Notulen ministerraad, Apr. 1848, 2.02.05.02. and especially the conversation in the Council on the 28th of April.

<sup>152</sup> 'Uit de geschiedenis onzer provincie, Nederland en de Duitse Bond 1815-1851, Holland koos rust en handelsbelangen, 7 punten voor de afscheiding van Limburg „Uitw van ons land". "De nieuwe Limburger". Maastricht, 09-10-1956, p. 5. Consulted on Delpher on 21-04-2023, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMCC01:048040033:mpeg21:p00005>. The quote is from the editor of the Arnhemsche Courant, G.H.J Boussevain.

<sup>153</sup> Index, FOD, Willmar to d'Hoffenschmidt. The letters of the 1st and second of April truly delve into the development of that situation.

<sup>154</sup> The second Luxemburg is the Belgian province of Luxemburg.

was not a neutral act, even if it was decided by plebiscite to join Belgium, and would destroy the 1839 agreement.<sup>155</sup> As the Belgian Prime Minister, Charles Rogier saw it, any question of redrawing borders would only weaken the country's position.<sup>156</sup> The Luxembourgian movement would thus not be supported by Belgium, nor by Prussia, that threatened to invade Luxemburg in the case of a Pro-Belgian uprising, which Belgium very much tied to the Prussian conflict with Denmark and Prussia's need to assert itself directly over the members of the German Confederation with foreign monarchs.<sup>157</sup> There were also fears that France might react with invasion if Luxemburg were to join Belgium.<sup>158</sup>

What is important for this thesis is the fact that these movements threatened the integrity of the borders of the Low Countries and therefore Belgian neutrality, which she was desperate to maintain lest she be destroyed in war and that this fear for a breach of 1839 actively influenced policy making. The Belgian governor of Luxemburg, Smits, took a step further in his assessment of the situation there and the dangers for European peace if the Luxembourgian question were to be handled with not enough care.

*"From the midst of the upheavals of which Europe is the theatre, a German unity can arise. If it establishes itself, France will lose its political supremacy for another nation, stronger than it in numbers, will establish itself and because of that we would have lent to her, directly or indirectly, by the thoughtless movement of our population to the that the Grand Duchy, the cause to invade us to restore its political preponderance.*

*Now, Belgium (annexed) to France means a general war, it is the port of Antwerp transformed, once again, into an armed pistol at the throat of England; it is the ruin of our*

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<sup>155</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 54-55. He however took these assessments from Smits to Rogier, Mar 16 to 20. Smits being the Belgian governor of Luxemburg. Rogier was the prime minister of Belgium. The letter of Smits can also be read in d'Hoffenschmidt to Willmar, 1 Apr., N 198, CNB as d'Hoffenschmidt sent an extract of the letter of the governor to Willmar.

<sup>156</sup> Ibidem, 56.

<sup>157</sup> Nothomb to d'Hoffenschmidt, 27 Mar, 1848, CNB.

<sup>158</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 55.

*capital and the metropolis of our commerce; it is the ruin of Luxemburg interests, left without any defenders at the extremity of a vast State which, in the past, never cared about her.*<sup>159</sup>

Still, in these developments in the border region between Belgium/Luxemburg, France and German, the greatest threat was still perceived as coming from France. The language used also obviously shows the allegory to the Napoleonic and Revolutionary Wars.<sup>160</sup> This is in contrast to the Dutch mostly fearing a German involvement in what it saw as its national affairs.

### Risking it all at Risquons-Tout

Just after Sérurier's arrival, news came to Belgium about the formation of a 'Belgian Legion' in Paris, which had the goal of overthrowing the Brussels government and installing a Republican regime.

One would expect a large European response to the paramilitary movement from the *Association des Patriotes Belges* (APB), but this did not happen, when they invaded Belgium from French soil. As Gooch said, the crisis remained a storm in a glass.<sup>161</sup> The APB was a club consisting of Belgian revolutionaries and working people who lived in and around Paris. They were allegedly supported by members of the Provisional Government. The biggest threat to peace between the two countries surrounding this march of the Belgian Legion towards Belgium had to do with the degree of involvement of the Provisional Government.<sup>162</sup> In a letter from d'Hoffenschmidt to de Ligne, he stated that under the pretext of returning the unemployed Belgian labourers from Paris to Belgium, that the organisers of the Belgian Legion had requested a convoy to the Belgian border.<sup>163</sup> Although Lamartine vigorously

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<sup>159</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt to Willmar, 1 Apr, 1848, N 198, CNB.

<sup>160</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>161</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963).

<sup>162</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt to Willmar, 1 Apr, 1848, N 198, CNB.

<sup>163</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt to de Ligne, 10 Mar, 1848, N 121. CNB

denied any involvement with the movement and even feigned ignorance of such a movement existing in Paris on the 10th, it seems unlikely that Lamartine was oblivious to such things. d'Hoffenschmidt was even privy to the address in Paris at which the association gathered from Brussels.<sup>164</sup> On the 21st, this suspicion that Lamartine was only feigning ignorance was reinforced when a French propagandist in Belgium, Jules Hetzet, was indicted by Belgian secret police. He carried an unofficial letter, confirmed by Sérurier as belonging to Lamartine, in which he was ordered to spread the revolution to Belgium. The Belgian government decided to not make this information public to defend the Provisional Government, and thus itself, from the outrage of the Great Powers.<sup>165</sup> If true, it would show that Lamartine may have opposed war, but not the spread of the revolutionary ideology. On the 2nd of March, de Weyer had been informed by Palmerston that Britain would not intervene because of the Russian notion that a French Republic would be incompatible with peace but *“if France, swept along by the spirits of propaganda and conquest, went beyond her (territorial) limits, and by undermining the independence of neighbouring peoples, were to attack England, then England would act according to the gravity of the situation.”*<sup>166</sup> The actions by the Belgian Legion and even Lamartine were exactly as described by Palmerston here.

An important reason for the lack of a reaction is likely the moving of the attention of the Great Powers and Belgium having no interest in making the involvement of the Provisional Government public. In the second half of March, the attention of the Great Powers was now fixated on the events in Germany. The Holy Alliance of Northern Powers, the reactionary powers who had dethroned Napoleon, had existed in one way or another ever since 1789 and had always sought to preserve the status quo in Europe.<sup>167</sup> Now, it had collapsed, which

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<sup>164</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>165</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt to de Ligne, 21 Mar. 1848, N 164. CNB.

<sup>166</sup> De Weyer to d'Hoffenschmidt, London, 2 Mar. 1848, N34, 3. CNB.

<sup>167</sup> In the letters, the terms Northern Alliance and Holy Alliance are used interchangeably. These powers consist of Prussia, Austria and Russia. Due to the events in Berlin and Vienna, the alliance had collapsed.

was seen by Nothomb, the Belgian emissary in Berlin, as the greatest event of the century.<sup>168</sup> Who were now going to make sure a European War would not come to pass now? As shown by the Limburgian and Luxemburgian questions, the German Revolutionaries were more than willing to influence events in what they saw as Germany or tied to Germany and in this case threatened Russia. Nothomb stated that:

*“Germany is closer to war with Russia than with France. By the revolution of Vienna, the question of peace or war left the plains of Lombardy. By the revolution of Berlin, the question of peace or war is perhaps transferred to the plains of Poland, Courland and Livonia. Mark it well, the resurrection of Poland was already a great question, but it no longer presents itself alone; if the German provinces of the Baltic claim their nationality, a reconstituted Germany, can a liberal Germany abandon them? These provinces have remained German, despite all the efforts of Slavism and the Greek religion.”*<sup>169</sup> European peace, according to the Great Powers, no longer dependent on Belgium and France, but on Germany and Russia.<sup>170</sup>

The Belgian Liberal politician Paul Devaux still feared war with France above all else. According to him, the complete responsibility for peace between Belgium and France, and even Europe, now laid with France’s Provisional Government after the fall of the Holy Alliance. His only optimism was that two months might pass before the inevitable war.<sup>171</sup> Leopold believed that the best safeguard for European peace would be the realisation that an attack on Belgium by France would mean general war, although there were little concerns for an invasion from France coming from the government. The Prussians agreed, but were beset by their own problems, while Britain did not want to play into the hands of the French war hawks as an agreement like that could be seen as an act of hostility in France.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Nothomb to d’Hoffenschmidt, Berlin, 23 Mar. N.167. CNB.

<sup>169</sup> Ibidem, 2.

<sup>170</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>171</sup> P. Devaux to Rogier, Mar 24, 1848, RP, 126. In Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 70.

<sup>172</sup> Gooch, Brison, *Belgium and the February Revolution*. (The Hague 1963), 75.

During this shifting of attention, the Belgian Legion saw its chance to move on Belgium. It was the military wing of the APB (Association des Patriotes Belges), marshalled by the leaders of the movement, Frédéric Blervacq and Charles Graux.<sup>173</sup> They worked together with the Belgian Democratic Association back in Belgium for recruitment within Belgium. The APB meanwhile mobilised the Belgian workers with revolutionary ideas in Paris to march on Brussels when the time would be right. It is almost impossible to gather how much support the Provisional Government had given the Belgian Legion, or the other foreign Legions that had been formed in Paris. These were a Polish and a German Legion. We do know from a letter from de Ligne to d'Hoffenschmidt that all these paramilitary units left Paris on the 25th of March, some walking, some by train.<sup>174</sup> The Provisional Government was, according to their discourse with de Ligne, completely powerless to stop proletarian foreigners from returning to their various homelands.<sup>175</sup> Except, according to de Ligne, the majority of this force was made up of Frenchmen. They were supposed to move to Lille and there be reinforced with ammunition and additional workers to fall on Kortrijk or Ghent, counting on the 20.000 workers in the city to come to their aid.<sup>176</sup>

When questioned, Lamartine assured de Ligne that he was powerless to stop breaches of Belgian territory by paramilitary units. The Provisional Government could not prevent foreign democrats from leaving, nor did it want to, because they agitators of unrest in Paris. He told de Ligne:

*Your Government has the right to receive with rifle shots the disturbers who would enter like armed robbers on its territory.*<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Blervacq, Frederic, and Graux, Charles, *Mémoire publié par les citoyens Frederic Blervacq et Charles Graux*, published by 'citizens', unknown publication date, FOD. (1848\*). This is a short booklet with a collection of letters from Blervacq and Graux, found in the correspondence between Willmar and d'Hoffenschmidt of 1848 and should therefore be written in the same year. .

<sup>174</sup> De Ligne to d'Hoffenschmidt, Paris, 25 Mar, N.173. CNB.

<sup>175</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>176</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>177</sup> De Ligne to d'Hoffenschmidt, Paris, 27 Mar, N.182. CNB.

To which de Ligne replied:

*We will and we do not need permission.*<sup>178</sup>

Belgium managed to convince the Provisional Government to openly denounce all actions of the Belgian Legion in papers, assisted by Lord Normanby, the British emissary in Paris.<sup>179</sup> However, the Belgian Legion still received free provisions and weaponry, people in the Provisional Government as Caussiedère en Imbert, the governor of the Tuileries, were suspected to be providing those to the Legion.<sup>180</sup> Belgium in response sought British assurances against the Legion, as support for it was clearly coming from the Provisional Government. The British took a passive stance, seemingly being satisfied with Lamartine's assurances.<sup>181</sup> They were likely also under the impression that the Belgian army would be more than capable of beating back the Legion and that the Belgian pleas for help were made out of panic and fear.

An attempt to cross the border by train on the 28th was stopped near Quiéverain without bloodshed.<sup>182</sup> When the Legion fell onto the hamlet of Risquons-Tout a day later, they were decidedly beaten by the Belgian Army. According to the memories of Blervacq and Graux, that were released after the affair and by supporters of the Legion, the Belgian soldiers committed war crimes by killing people who had already surrendered. He also stated that the Belgian soldiers celebrated as if they had been victorious over the French.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>179</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>180</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt to De Weyer, London, 28 Mar. N184. CNB.

<sup>181</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>182</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt to de Ligne, 30 Mar. 1848, N 192. CNB.

<sup>183</sup> Blervacq, Frederic, and Graux, Charles, *Mémoire publié par les citoyens Frederic Blervacq et Charles Graux*, published by 'citizens', unknown publication date, FOD, (1848\*).



## Reaction

The involvement of the departmental government of Lille, and thus official French support, is difficult to ascertain. According to the French, who were believed by the Dutch, it had not been the French regional government who had given weapons to the Legion, but it had been farmers who had wanted to aid the Belgians by giving them weapons.<sup>184</sup> Regrettably, it is impossible to verify what exactly transpired between the Belgian Legion and the government in Lille, as all regional archives from the 19th century of the city have been destroyed in World War One.<sup>185</sup> According to Bentinck, the governor of Lille had not opposed Belgium, but had actually aided them, by providing her with information concerning the movements of the Legion.<sup>186</sup> However, the Belgian sources state that the news transmitted by the governor of Valenciennes and Lille had been false. He had said that the people moving north were mostly women and children; not armed men. The governor allegedly had even toasted on a Belgian Republic during a banquet.<sup>187</sup> Belgium also blamed the governor for not coming to Belgian aid.<sup>188</sup> Willmar would later claim to have proof that Risquons-Touts and Quiévrain were sponsored by the Dutch gold, but there is nothing in any sources from the Dutch side to substantiate those claims.<sup>189</sup>

Randwijck had at this point been replaced by the former Dutch emissary in London, Schimmelpenninck, as a temporary minister of Foreign Affairs. Schimmelpenninck would later also be prime minister. During his time in England, Schimmelpenninck had often

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<sup>184</sup> Bentinck to the duke of Randwijck, 26 Mar, 1848, N. 117. Gezantschap België en Luxemburg, N.A.

<sup>185</sup> "En 1916, les Archives municipales subissent de lourdes pertes au cours de l'incendie de l'ancien Hôtel de Ville : la quasi-totalité des documents du 19e siècle et du début du 20e siècle sont détruits." Archives de Lille, <https://archives.lille.fr/les-archives-de-lille/p239/une-histoire-sculaire>. Consulted on 10/05/2023.

<sup>186</sup> Bentinck to the duke of Randwijck, 26 Mar, 1848, N. 117. Gezantschap België en Luxemburg, N.A.

<sup>187</sup> d'Hoffenschmidt to de Ligne, 30 Mar, 1848, N 191. CNB

<sup>188</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>189</sup> Willmar to d'Hoffenschmidt, the Hague, 2 Apr, 1848, n 205. CNB.

requested aid for the Netherlands and Belgium from Britain in case of a French attack, as he believed that war was not just inevitable, but also that the two Low Countries alone would be no match for the French armies. Palmerston had taken a dismissive stance towards him, believing a war in Italy was much more likely at this point, as the United Kingdom did not guarantee the borders of Austria in Lombardy, that she should be able to handle herself as a Great Power.<sup>190</sup> Perhaps Schimmelpenninck had received the guarantees he had requested, because once he was in office, he adopted a more cold-hearted stance towards Belgium. Schimmelpenninck was dismissive of the Belgians, acting as if the conciliatory month of March had never happened.<sup>191</sup> He would not long be in office, being replaced by Bentinck. Bentinck, who had connections in Belgium and was familiar with the country, put a stop to Schimmelpenninck's reversal. Bentinck's time as foreign Minister would also be short, as he would be replaced by van Zuylen, who was more friendly to the Belgians.<sup>192</sup>

As opposed to the Belgian Radicals, the Dutch Radicals were quite tame. At the end of the month, the Amstel Association, a Dutch democratic club, was disbanded because most of their demands were to be fulfilled in the coming Dutch constitution. This was done with the words "*Long live the Reforms!*"<sup>193</sup> William's change of heart seemingly directly resulted in their dismantling. On the 26th, the Association had refused the Belgian request for a union between a Republican Netherlands and Belgium.<sup>194</sup> As van Bevervoorde fled the Netherlands in April, the Dutch Radical movement completely collapsed. Through Brussels, van Bevervoorde would go to Paris from where he would continue to criticise and threaten the Dutch government. In either June or July he would

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<sup>190</sup> De Weyer to d'Hoffenschmidt, N.99, CNB.

<sup>191</sup> De Ridder, Alfred, *Dix années de relations politiques entre le Belgique et les Pays Bays (9 avril 1839-1849)*. FOD.

<sup>192</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>193</sup> Willmar to d'Hoffenschmidt, the Hague, 1848. FOD, 116.

<sup>194</sup> Willmar to d'Hoffenschmidt, the Hague, 27 Mar, 1848, FOD, 104.

write in the pamphlet “*Verraad*” that ‘the French would come, if we do not make haste changing our state institutions. They would not come to conquer, but would go to war to spread their ideals.’<sup>195</sup> This shows at the same time that van Bevervoorde is trying to exploit any fears regarding a French invasion and also that these fears have not completely subsided, even in June. It is possible that during the June Uprising in France, the fears in the Netherlands and Europe for a Jacobinist France would surface again. However, this is beyond the scope of this thesis and the source material used for that would be vastly different, as I have doubts Lamartine would have changed his stance on war in April and June. Researching this would make an excellent topic for a different thesis.

Despite many accusations, Lamartine would continue to deny that he or any other French officials had anything to do with the Belgian Legion.<sup>196</sup> And although the threat of a new invasion remained, with the remnants of the beaten Legion still lurking near the Franco-Belgian border, Belgium decided to let Lamartine be and not press as hard as it maybe could have.<sup>197</sup> They did not need to. For the Great Powers and the Netherlands, the affair remained that: an affair. The Belgian Revolution had only occurred in Paris. Britain finally came through, because of Belgian concerns for repeated attacks from French soil, and now fully guaranteed Belgium, as by the promises made in 1815 and 1839.<sup>198</sup>

The French would turn on the Legion and the leaders would be taken into custody. The threat from France to Belgium would disappear in April. But the threat to European peace would remain, in the form of the conflict between Germany and Russia. According to the times, send to d’Hoffenschmidt by Weyer on the 1st of April, there would be three wars in Europe, if they had not already started. Sardinia-Piedmont would fight Austria in Lombardy.

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<sup>195</sup> Robijns, Marinus, *Radicalen in Nederland*. (Leiden 1967), 273.

<sup>196</sup> Lord Normanby to lord Palmerston, Paris, 1 Apr, 1848. CNB. This is incidentally the only English primary source used in this paper and De Ligne to d’Hoffenschmidt, Paris, 1 Apr, 1848. CNB.

<sup>197</sup> De Weyer to d’Hoffenschmidt, 31 Mar, 1848. CNB

<sup>198</sup> d’Hoffenschmidt to de Weyer, 1 Apr, 1848, CNB.

Prussia/Germany would wage war against Denmark for Schleswig-Holstein and France and Belgium would go to war. Of all these predictions, only the latter would not come to pass.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Weyer to de Ligne, 1 Apr, 1848, N201, CNB.

## Conclusion

As we have learned in this thesis, the fear of war was very influential and visible in European and also Belgian and Dutch policy making. It also transitioned through the months of February and March along the diplomatic situation in the Low Countries and Europe. In the first chapter, it becomes obvious that the initial reaction is very much tied to the memory of the French Revolution of 1789. The memory of a French Revolutionary army spreading across Europe once again was so in the minds of the people of the Low Countries, be they crowned head, politician or journalist. Revolution and war, and the fear to both, were intrinsically linked. Lamartine's manifesto tried to combat this fear of war of the mere existence of a French Republic and failed in his attempt at dismantling the reactionary response and pleasing the Left wing opposition. The Great Powers dictated the stance of the Low Countries towards France and the threat of war surrounding Belgium. Within the parameters established by the Great Powers, the Netherlands and Belgium sought to find gains and not be crushed at the same time. Because of their relation to the balance of power in Europe, the integrity of the Low Countries was essential to European peace, as a conquering French Republic would have immediately resulted in a general European war. In hindsight, we can put Lamartine's policy in a continuous policy of peacekeeping with a change of government in France, which was feared in the rest of Europe, as immortalised by Metternich's famous saying. "When France sneezes, the rest of Europe catches a cold." The commentary of the Austrian Chancellor had been on the Belgian Revolution that had followed the July Uprising in France, which resulted in the establishment of the Orleanist government. Louis Philippe had said the Orleans monarchy wanted peace, responding to the fears that his new, more Liberal state would want conquest and war. In 1848, Lamartine said the republic sought peace, responding to the same fears. And in 1852, Napoleon III would

say the empire meant peace. In essence, they all meant that France would not go to war until she had secured allies to guard against the danger of another defeat.<sup>200</sup>

After the initial fears subsided, the situation changed. The fear of war turned into a more traditional diplomatic jousting tournament as it became apparent that Lamartine was not out for all-out war. The situation was unstable, which was cause of more fear among the European Powers. As long as the Second Republic was not officially recognised as the French government, the 1839 agreement was on loose sand. This put the Belgian government in a difficult position. Belgium needed to have unofficial relations with a government, which was thought to be a great threat to its independence, while this was disapproved by the states that were protecting it. This left an opening for the Dutch to try and project their power over the Belgians. Still, this was a change in Dutch foreign policy regarding Belgium, as the Dutch for the first time tried to spread their influence in Belgium while not attempting to end Belgian independence. The fear of war in general resulted in the warming of Belgo-Dutch relationship and even in talks of a defensive alliance between the two countries. In these two periods, there were war hawks in Europe, notably Tsarist Russia and the Left Wing opposition in France and in the Provisional Government. Some in Belgium feared that the Dutch king would also be a war hawk, like the Belgian emissary in the Netherlands, Willmar, but William, in fear of his crown, moved the Dutch government to conciliation and even alliance with Belgium, in correspondence with the 1839 treaty that he had sought to dismantle only a few years prior. The kings and queens of Europe communicated with each other and, according to their individual power over their governments, dictated country policies. In Belgium, Leopold's diplomacy was complementary to that of d'Hoffenschmidt and de Ligne in keeping the relations with the other European powers amiable. His link to France was severed with the removal of Louis Phillipe from the French throne and as head of state had no correspondence with Lamartine,

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<sup>200</sup> Bridge, F. R, and Roger Bullen, *The great powers and the European states system 1814-1914* (Oxon 2013).

as official relations were not established with the Second Republic until May. William in the Netherlands had a much more proactive role. His stance changed after he gave in to the demands of a more liberal constitution and it had become clear that Dutch royal power was in its twilight. Randwijck as a minister of Foreign Affairs was mostly a front man for William's private diplomacy and he was removed at the end of March when royal power waned in the Netherlands.

As the Spring of Nations spread across Europe the fear of war changed considerably. Independence movements sprang up across Europe, also in the Netherlands and Belgium, which threatened the fragile peace existing there. Small incidents in Dutch Limburg and Belgian Luxemburg could have possibly drawn the Netherlands and Belgium into the revolutionary maelstrom in Germany. As the attention of the Great Powers shifted, who had guaranteed the borders in the Low Countries, Belgium was attacked from France, but not directly by France. In the wake of the fall of the Holy Alliance of Russia, Prussia and Austria, which had nearly turned upon itself, the Belgian Legion attempted to invade Belgium. This could have resulted in a general war, but this was not in Belgian interest as the government knew Belgium would be crushed between the other Great Powers and France. It may have won the war against France as part of a European coalition, but at what cost? Belgium's reliance on foreign powers to maintain its neutrality, especially France, was shown to Belgium as being an unsustainable foreign policy, as the entire independence of the state was immediately threatened if one of her guarantors turned against her. Because of this, the country adopted a form of armed neutrality, which would later save the country, and Europe, from German dominance.

Throughout the thesis it is shown that the threat and fear of war actively influenced decision-making in the Low Countries and also in countries beyond. For example, information was withheld about the involvement of Lamartine in the sending of propagandists to Belgium, as to not invoke the wrath of the reactionary Great Powers, as Belgium feared to be crushed in

a subsequent war between France and the other Powers. The Netherlands took on a more friendly stance towards Belgium under the threat coming from France and they chose to hold onto Limburg out of fear of repercussions. The position of the Low Countries within the chaos following the February Revolution was integral to European diplomacy, but also to European peace in late February and the entirety of the month of March. The more supranational approach taken in this thesis has shown us that the fears did not remain in one country, but were actually shared in a broader, transnational context. Diplomats from different countries worked together to combat a possible war, while Revolutionaries crossed borders and sought contact in other countries to start a war to bring revolution to more countries. They also tried to use the fear of war to their own advantage. Border regions were especially volatile in the Low Countries, as they were inflexible by treaty, and any threat to them was met with hostility.

To refer back to Valentin, it is apparent that nationalism and internationalism had indeed not yet become 'contrary opposites,' at least not when it came to the fear for war. These were transnationally shared. Of course, the main focus of governments was to make sure that their own countries fared best under the changed circumstances, but a new European War like the French Revolutionary or Napoleonic Wars was fresh in the minds of all governments. To avoid new bloodshed like that, states were willing to even deny territorial expansion, as shown by Belgium in the Luxemburgian case or Prussia in the case of Limburg. Avoiding war with France was seen as more important than enlarging the nation.

In the end, the fears for war in the Low Countries remained exactly that: fears. There would be no Second French Revolutionary War and no new Napoleon in 1848. For all the diplomatic manoeuvring and all the possible *casi belli*, ultimately, little happened in the end on the subject of military action. The fears, however, were profound and actively shaped policies and the diplomatic arena of 1848. For the Low Countries, the fears of a conquering revolutionary France never manifested itself into a reality. The memory of the First Republic had made a Republican France in the early 19th century something like a phantom in the



night, a sort of horror story mothers would tell their children to make sure they remained in bed at night so as not to be caught by the bloodthirsty Robespierre or Murat. The terror these people invoked into the minds of the people of government in Europe, alongside Napoleon was profound. At the start of the French Revolution in 1848, people had not known that the Second Republic did not want war, at least not if it was not on their terms. There was a certain conditionality and rationale in the assessments of the Provisional Governments that many in Europe did not think it would possess. Because of this, the Second Republic remained a phantom terror, instead of turning into an existential threat to the balance of power in Europe, which would have led to war.

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