

# Empires and Nations from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century



Empires and Nations from the Eighteenth  
to the Twentieth Century:  
Volume 1

Edited by

Antonello Biagini and Giovanna Motta

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P U B L I S H I N G

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## INTRODUCTION

# FROM GREAT EMPIRES TO NATION-STATES: THE HISTORY OF EUROPE IN POLITICAL DYNAMICS FROM THE EIGHTEENTH TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

ANTONELLO BIAGINI

The “Conference Rome 2013. Empires and Nations” was an important event that gathered scholars from all over the world and the Italian working group of PRIN (*Progetto di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale*—Project of Relevant National Interest), which was approved and financed by the Italian Ministry of Education. The project included works of original archive researches and study opportunities during which the exchange of suggestions encouraged the deepening of historical subjects whose importance recently has been revived. The PRIN project lasted two years (2012–13) and engaged a significant number of scholars who focused their attention on two turning points in the history of international systems: the Congress of Vienna of 1815 and the Congress of Paris of 1919. The first was based on the concept of restoration that had to avoid the “dangerous” ideological, political and social mechanisms placed by the French Revolution and spread by Napoleon’s expansionism; the second was considered, more than a peace, a compromise between the United States, Great Britain and France.

In the PRIN project a young generation of historians under the age of forty actively participated with significant works issued also in numerous publications; frequent contacts between Italian and foreign scholars widened the analysis of historical themes and issues and in this way a need was born for the coordinators of the project to organize a meeting that could face the wide scope of humanistic disciplines in the period that is unfavorable and not open towards culture. Around two hundred scholars cooperated within the PRIN project and many participated in the conference organized at Sapienza University of Rome on June 20 and 21,

2013, presenting their papers in numerous sessions, which were generally chaired by the members of the Scientific Committee. The titles of the sessions show the width of the researches that had been carried out: (1) The Roots of Nation-States: National Identity in the Modern Age; (2) National Identities in Eastern Europe; (3) Cultures, Economy and Social Identities between Nations and Empires; (4) Colonial Politics and the Age of Empires; (5) Rethinking the European Map: From the Balkans to the Great War; (6) The Building of National Identity: The case of South and Eastern Europe; (7) The Age of Extremes: Communism, the Cold War and their Consequences.

In the conference 196 scholars participated as contributors from thirty-five countries (Italy, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Romania, Germany, France, India, United States, Georgia, Russian Federation, Great Britain, Australia, Republic of China, Latvia, Montenegro, Greece, Slovakia, Holland, Sweden, Cyprus, Canada, Finland, Poland, Serbia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Macedonia, Belgium, Ethiopia, Portugal, Slovenia, Turkey). There were thirty panels (thirteen on the first day and seventeen on the second) during which the papers published here were presented. The conference was organized with the supervision of the Scientific Committee of sixteen members and the working language was English.

In this cultural context, the main objective was to analyze the interrelations between multinational *empires* and the affirmation of the idea of *nation*, thus, during the days of the conference, scholars and specialists, academics and non-academics examined both the “historical” empires and the new national (and multinational) states. The nineteenth century, in fact, saw the rise of the struggle of oppressed peoples for liberty, independence and national sovereignty. The revolts in 1820–21 and 1848–49, the Eastern crisis, the unification and the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, as well as German unification and the Balkan conflicts, testify to the inadequacy of the international system of the European balance of powers. In 1914, in fact, one hundred years after the Congress of Vienna, the Great War—at the beginning on the European and later on the world scale—demonstrated the fragility of that system. Preceded by regional and smaller but not secondary conflicts, such as the Balkan Wars (1912–13), the First World War brought the dissolution of the great multinational empires, the end of Prussian militarism and expansionism and the need to redraw the map of Europe according to the principles of national sovereignty and self-determination of peoples, the ideal formulation of Wilson. Formally, a new era of international “democracy,” characterized by the affirmation of nation-states with their own

sovereignty, liberty and independence, had to be opened, but ideological tensions and social contrasts widely spread in all Europe produced contradictory effects and brought a twenty-year-long period of crisis and instability.

At the “Conference Rome 2013. Empires and Nations,” in addition to numerous topics, researchers also focused on the following issues: the formation of national states in antithesis to the collapsed great multinational empires; nationalism as the devolution of the idea of nation; the end of bipolarity and the Cold War. The proceedings presented in the two volumes are an efficient proof of the interest towards the issues and concepts such as identity, sovereignty, nationality and supra-nationality, arguments often considered outdated but that always come back into focus, especially in periods of crisis.

The Iron Curtain from Stettin to Trieste divided for almost half a century the European continent. The bipolar system and the East/West contrast were characterized by opposed political and economic systems: dictatorship/democracy and planned/private economy. The Cold War conflict was not fought by weapons, but the opposition could not be eliminated; the development of nuclear weapon technologies, the so-called equilibrium of terror, discouraged a direct confrontation between the two world powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The fall of the Berlin Wall represented the end of the “short” twentieth century, a century of harsh contrasts between democracy, dictatorship and totalitarianism, between the national state and the ethnic state, between local particularism and the phenomenon of globalization. The United States won the Cold War, but the country was not prepared for such an event that even in 1986 was considered impossible by Brzezinski, who regarded that the East-West antagonism was almost perennial. At the same time, in Russia, a new generation with Gorbachev was holding the power and Soviet control over the socialist satellite states was weakened. In Poland, for example, already from 1981 the government of General Jaruzelski had infringed the Brezhnev doctrine about the inviolability of the political monopoly of Communist parties in Eastern Europe. The signing of the agreement between Reagan and Gorbachev for the dismantling of missiles (1987) represented the first act of withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Europe. This important act and Reagan’s imaginative project related to the “star wars” (a kind of last act of opposition to the “evil empire”) still did not raise the awareness on the part of the United States about the imminent “victory” over the Soviet Union. As a consequence, the 1989, according to many, represented a clear split between *before* and *after* in the international relations.

The reluctance of the North American superpower to accept the end of the forty-year-long opposition with the Soviet Union posed a hard task to assume the role of “*gendarmérie* of the world,” to regulate infinite international controversies, determining important immediate consequences. From the Balkans to the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein, the United States was forced to renounce its neo-isolationism: an approach that the history of the first half of the twentieth century had already seen with serious harm to the stability of the international system. A solution, at times tried and practiced, was to share such responsibility with the already existing structures—such as NATO—that including Western Europe could become an instrument for the creation of a substantial equilibrium in the relations with the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe. For these countries in transition, the possibility to join the Atlantic Alliance before entering the structure of the European Community definitely had a positive impact in avoiding the recurrence of some conflicts that had never been resolved in the center of Europe. In other words, with the end of the Cold War (the “outbreak of peace”) the powers that for years had financed NATO hoped to limit the actions of police and control, willing that all nations “make and divide the peace” through substantial cuts in military spending. At the same time, in the old continent, the end of the bipolar system first posed the issue of German reunification and then the question of its leadership in Europe.

However, the hope for a stable international order was an illusion: the Gulf Wars and the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans and in the south of the world—progressively strengthened by religious fundamentalism—showed that Soviet internationalism perhaps had suppressed but did not remove the national contrasts that always have characterized the history of Europe. For the third time in the course of the twentieth century, Europe risked to find itself again in the scene of inner wars and struggles that questioned its role of power based on the respect of human rights, political democracies and free trade. Central and Eastern Europe, which already had experienced the burden of Soviet hegemony, moved towards a hard process of democratization to introduce political liberal systems and to replace the planned economy with the free one, facing enormous difficulties. At the end, the globalized world system brought new phenomena of integration that many countries had difficulties to face, producing a kind of insecurity in numerous national communities: as a consequence micro-nationalism and religious extremism arose as instruments for the defense of identity.

These and many other issues were the topics of the conference in which numerous scholars from different countries participated with the papers published in the following pages. I want to thank them for their

contributions and also for keeping the texts short according to the criteria that we had to impose. I would like also to mention the PRIN project's Rome and Teramo units and their numerous activities that involved professors, researchers, young fellows, PhD students both in the organization of the seminars, study days, cultural events and in researches that produced monographs, publications and editions of archive documents and materials.

## **Publications of the PRIN project “Empires and Nations from the 18th to the 20th Century”**

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- . 2013. *L'idea di Nazione e l'Impero fra storia e letteratura*. Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura.
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### Year 2013 – Teramo Unit

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- Pommier Vincelli, Daniel, and Andrea Carteny. 2013. *La repubblica democratica dell'Azerbaigian. I documenti militari italiani (1919-1920)*. Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura.
- Pommier Vincelli, Daniel, and Andrea Carteny. 2013. *L'Azerbaigian nei documenti diplomatici italiani (1919-1920)*. Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura.



## **PART I**

### **THE ROOTS OF NATION-STATES**



## CHAPTER ONE

# EMPIRES AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN THE MODERN ERA

## LIVING AT THE CROSSROADS OF EMPIRES: THE AUSTRIAN NETHERLANDS AND THE BALANCE OF POWER GAME

JEAN-CHARLES SPEECKAERT

*“E tu involati, parti! Al tuo signore di’,  
che l’opre de’ regi, sian di bene, o di mal,  
son sempre esempio”<sup>1</sup>*

*Giulio Cesare*, Georg Friedrich Haendel, 1724

### **The Belgian space**

Nowadays Brussels is known as the capital of Europe and NATO and is often seen as a cold international hub hailing privileged technocrats and diplomats from all four corners of the continent. The presence in this region of foreigners—ambassadors—is more ancient. Although Belgium as a nation-state dates from 1830, permanent diplomatic links in the ancient Netherlands should be traced back in the sixteenth century (under the Spanish domination) (Bély 2008, 657–70).

Under this period, the vision of a *monarchia universalis* spanning the globe was a pursued dream in the Habsburg House. Charles V was leading

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<sup>1</sup> “Et toi, cours, vole! Va dire à ton maître que les actions des rois, qu’elles soient bonnes ou mauvaises, servent toujours d’exemple.” César à Achille, acte I, scène 3, *Giulio Cesare*, Georg Friedrich Haendel, livret de Nicola Francesco Haym, 1724 (Second, André, éd., Actes Sud, Marseille, 2008, 49).

an “empire on which the sun never sets” (Blockmans and Mout 2004). This *Eldorado* rapidly raised envy and imitation among the Europeans. France, particularly, took advantage of the crisis in Madrid (no heir to the throne) and the Turkish attacks against the Habsburgs in Vienna to expand its territory, forming what is called the *pré carré*.

As a result, the “Belgian space” had been the battlefield of Europe during the seventeenth century. History probably does not provide many other examples of such an obstinate opposition between two powers (Bourbons and Habsburgs), whose “Century of Louis XIV” populations were the painful witness. European diplomacy moved. The pattern was definitely no more dictated by one vertical ultimate authority, i.e. the emperor or the pope (Bély 2007; Aron 1962).

### **The crisis of multinational empires and the balance of Europe**

By the mid-eighteenth century, the situation has completely changed (Malettke 1998; Soutou 2010). The crisis of multinational empires is evidence. Over and above that, the sense of *aequilibrium* flourished. The ideal foreign policy is based on the view of international justice and the balance of power that excludes the hegemonic domination of one or two princes. The notion is probably as ancient as the first Greco-Roman cities (Bernardi, Braun 2011). The principle of balance—*bilanx*—appeared thanks to Italian humanism. In the peninsula, every city-state is wary about the domination of a rival. Florence advances the idea of balance corresponding to the Latin words *aequilibras*, *aequipondium* and offers an ideal to Europe, to Christianity that has lost its unity (Reformation). The concept is spreading in Europe. After others, Abbé de Saint-Pierre is a good example with his reflection on the *Perpetual Peace* (1713). Even Rousseau and Kant tried to demonstrate how it was feasible. Finally, English diplomacy imposed the balance of power, with the triumph of intermediary states over empires.

The question here is to apprehend these transformations from the Southern Netherlands’ point of view. We address this by focusing on the diplomatic network in Brussels, and mainly on the French ambassadors in the eighteenth century—as France is probably the most important neighbor.

By contrast with what has preceded, the French and especially Belgian countries remained quiescent after 1748 (after the War of the Austrian Succession), enabling a development of arts, sciences and industries during a half-century (Galand 2010). This is not the least achievement. It

raises a fundamental question: does it mean that a lasting peace is possible without being always preceded by armed confrontation stages?

## **Bibliography and archives**

To summarize briefly, it has to be said that neither the embassy in Brussels nor the relations between France and the Austrian Netherlands have been the subject of a systematic and recent analysis. This research owes to the renewal of the history of diplomacy and international relations inspired by the French historian Lucien Bély. Several researchers follow his approach characterized by the great care taken to analyze the practices, ideas, forms of representation and results of negotiators who expressed the interests of their princes, and beyond, of their subjects (e.g. Géraud Poumarède and Daniela Frigo).

The concept of “balance of power” has not been studied exhaustively. Searchers have focused firstly on the theoreticians’ thought. Historians and political scientists have often defined it with their own contemporary theories and concepts (Schroeder 1986; Osiander 1994).

The history of the Austrian Monarchy, with a particular focus on the Netherlands, benefits from the insights of, among others, Jean Bérenger, Braubach, Lothar Schilling, Hasquin, Michèle Galand (who has highlighted the very complex role of Governor Charles de Lorraine and the plenipotentiaries), Hochedlinger, Szabo (about Kaunitz), Zedinger.

Regarding the sources, I have used the political correspondence of French diplomats in Brussels. The letters are conserved in the archives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry (Paris-La Courneuve). In parallel, in the Belgian State Archives (Brussels), I have tried to go through the archives of the Austrian Netherlands’ administration.

## **The roots of a lasting peace (Diplomatic Revolution)**

The relation between France and the Austrian Netherlands, as well as Europe, took a new dimension after the negotiation of an alliance between France and Austria, signed in 1756. What we call the “Diplomatic Revolution” is an unprecedented event, suddenly ending centuries of conflicts between the Bourbons and the Habsburgs.

As soon as the early 1750s, the ambassadors in Brussels act in a context of redefining alliances. When, in May 1752, Dominique de Lesseps met for the first time Charles de Lorraine, governor of the Netherlands and brother-in-law of Maria Theresa, and gave him his credentials, the letter states the king of France (Louis XV)

“souhait(e)entretenir de plus en plus l’heureuse intelligence qui habitoit entre (lui) et l’impératrice.”<sup>2</sup> The tone is set. Versailles plans to develop its relations with Vienna and Brussels under the sign of concord.

Officially, the Franco-Prussian alliance, opposed to the Anglo-Austrian, remains valid. In November 1755, Bernis, who secretly negotiated with the Austrians (Kaunitz), commands Lesseps in Brussels to insist on the loyalty of France for Prussia.<sup>3</sup> But, simultaneously, the French foreign minister, Rouillé, makes clear in the Netherlands that it must be chosen between an eventual rapprochement with France and the traditional alliance with England. Both are incompatible.<sup>4</sup> This illustrates the lack of uniformity of French foreign policy in this time: one has to distinguish the official canal (often overwhelmed), the “Secret” (quite anti-Austrian) and, last but not least, the “Pompadour” diplomacy (including Choiseul and supporting an alliance with Maria Theresa) (Rogister 2010).

In Brussels, Prince Charles pleads frankly in favor of a reversal of the longstanding alliances. As a consequence of Berlin forging an alliance with London by the Treaty of Westminster (January 16, 1756) (Hatton 1982),<sup>5</sup> which means an almost certain dissolution of the Franco-Prussian alliance, Charles de Lorraine openly expresses his desire for a “*changement de système*.”<sup>6</sup> He adds a strong criticism of his officially English ally. As a result, the ambassador compares the Francophile prince to a “bon citoyen français.”

If this little prince, of a very small land, is so upset about the European transformations, it is because an attack on the Netherlands was not excluded at the end of 1755 (Galand 1999). The governor does not want Belgium to be a new source and victim of international conflict. This vulnerable country has given enough. The protection of a Great Power is necessary. The Enlightened and now moderated France will play that role for half a century. Of course, it would be a mistake to think that this is done for the single pleasure of Charles. No, in the Low Countries, internal movements failed or succeeded only to the extent that they paralleled

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<sup>2</sup> Lettre de créance de Louis XV à Charles de Lorraine, 2 mai 1752, A.A.É., C.P., P.B., vol. 141, f. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Lettre de Bernis à Lesseps du 15 novembre 1755, A.A.É., C.P., P.B., vol. 144, f.292-292v.

<sup>4</sup> Lettre de Rouillé à Lesseps du 30 décembre 1755, A.A.É., C.P., P.B., vol. 144, f.327-328v.

<sup>5</sup> London searched a continental ally able to support the Electorate of Hanover (homeland of the English dynasty) (Hatton 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Lettre de Lesseps à Rouillé du 31 janvier 1756, A.A.É., C.P., P.B., vol. 145, f.27-32.

Great Power interests—this is a constant in this region's history (Fitzmaurice 1983).

### **An uneasy status (exchange with Bavaria and fear of Prussia)**

Despite the reversal in 1756, Belgian status remains uncertain. In the second Treaty of Versailles (1757), possible concessions of Maria Theresa are mentioned. The Netherlands would be given to Don Philip, Duke of Parma (Louis XV's son-in-law), in exchange for Parma, which would be conceded to Austria. This did not happen.

The "great exchange" for the Court of Vienna had for purpose the acquisition of Bavaria, the Wittelsbachs Electorate, which would realign the frontiers of its heartlands. At least on two occasions, in 1778–79 and 1784–85, projects were proposed to exchange Bavaria against part of the Netherlands' possessions (Hochedlinger 2003, 364–75).

The correspondence of Jean-Balthazar d'Adhémar, the French ambassador in Brussels after Lesseps, contains an interesting dissertation addressed to the Count de Vergennes, the recent foreign minister. The letter dates from October 1774, three years before Maximilian III Joseph of Bavaria's death and the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–79). The title is explicit: "Mémoire concernant l'échange des Pays-Bas."<sup>7</sup>

Under the pretext that the Netherlands are too far from the center of the monarchy and powerless to help Vienna in its struggle to recover Silesia,<sup>8</sup> the author assesses that propositions of exchanges may be legitimate: "des propositions d'échange ne seroient pas rejetées comme autrefois," (this shows that the issue is ancient). If executed in tandem with France, it would, in his opinion, reinforce the fragile alliance: "l'exécution de ce projet cimentroit à perpétuité l'union des Maisons d'Autriche et de Bourbon." He is aware that Versailles' agreement is a *sine qua non* condition.

With many details, the author (baron de Lux?) explains how it is feasible to exchange the Netherlands to acquire Bavaria. He adds that the Belgian provinces risk that "Prusse et Angleterre n'aient formé le projet d'en faire la conquête pour y établir les ducs de Mecklembourg, dont les États seroient réunis au Brandebourg."

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<sup>7</sup> Mémoire concernant l'échange des Pays-Bas présenté à Monseigneur le Comte de Vergennes par le baron de Lux, du 16 octobre 1774, A.A.É., C.P., P.B., vol. 169, f.246-246v.

<sup>8</sup> Taken by Frederick II of Prussia in December 1740, Silesia is of great strategic, economic and demographic importance.

One finds here another source of anxiety in the Netherlands: the emergence of Prussia. In Brussels, the uncertainty about the near future is real. Maria Theresa never accepted to abandon the Silesian territory. Some in Vienna suggested offering border areas of the Netherlands to Berlin, which could have served to round off Prussia's Rhenish provinces (Hochedlinger 2003, 249). More than once, the government in Brussels expressed concerns about Prussian plans. For instance, in May 1778, at a very critical moment during the War of the Bavarian Succession, Frederick II has already crossed into Bohemia. It is feared that he could reach the Netherlands through the East. Much later, in 1789, the French ambassador in Brussels, Chevalier de La Gravière, reports the anxiety that the Southern Netherlands could be reunited to the Northern Netherlands.<sup>9</sup>

From all of this, nothing happened. Regarding the Bavarian exchange, it was difficult to secure an international agreement. Both Louis XVI and Vergennes believed that an Austrian Bavaria would destroy the balance of power in Germany. The king, although married with the Austrian Marie Antoinette, wrote to his minister: "[L'] alliance qui nous unit avec l'Autriche ... ne nous oblige pas d'entrer dans leurs vues d'ambition et d'injustice" (Hardman and Price 1998, 113). Prussia never attacked the Belgian space. The states that became the principal victims of the conflicts were Saxony and Poland (partitions). The Netherlands remain peaceful and in Austrian hands. But, from all of this, it follows that a "false idea" (i.e. here a plan not realized) is a "true fact." It shows the fragility of a land trying to "invent" itself (Dubois 2005).

### **Diplomatic practices: An Austrian model?**

Ambassadors rarely make explicit references to theoreticians in their correspondence. One can find that some rules are applied only by a careful analysis. This confirms that the influence of thinkers on the European governments, on the *praxis* of international law, still needs to be demonstrated (Dhondt 2011).

Is the setting up and the preservation of the peace a main concern of the French diplomats and the Austrian dignitaries in Brussels? In 1756, the "renversement des alliances" is widely seen as a sudden and terrible event (especially for the French anti-Habsburg). The unification process is consequently slowed down by the weight of tradition.

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<sup>9</sup> Lettre de Trauttmansdorff à Kaunitz, s.d. [1789], A.G.R., *C.A.P.B.*, *C.O.V.B.*, *R.G.*, vol. 313, f.400.



In general, the attention to preserve the principles of peace concluded at the end of the War of the Austrian Succession (1748) and the Seven Years War (1763) is noticeable in Brussels. Since the “Diplomatic Revolution,” Versailles and Vienna have tried to build a peaceful relationship. The courts cooperate during the Seven Years War (1756–63) and after the return of peace. If not optimal, the collaboration between France and Brussels did work at some points. The information reported by French diplomats has as a leitmotiv the preservation of the peace, a European harmony.

In November 1757, Lesseps told Bernis about “le maintien de l’équilibre.”<sup>10</sup> In January 1776, regarding the borders, Vergennes insists to Adhémar that “Sa Majesté pensoit avoir rendu la *balance* égale.”<sup>11</sup> About the rise of William Pitt the Younger in England, Adhémar makes the following analysis: “les conjonctures que j’en tire ne sont pas d’un heureux augure pour la *paix* ... . Tant pis [pour] les amis de l’Humanité.”<sup>12</sup>

Adhémar’s language is very interesting for the diplomats’ values. In a letter to Vergennes from September 1778, he repeats a conversation he had with the Austrian Starhemberg on the European politics: “M. de S[tarhemberg] m’a parlé dans les termes les plus amicaux relativement à ce grand principe d’agrandissement réciproque, qu’il ne faut pas souffrir qu’entre deux grandes puissances rivales, l’une s’agrandisse sans mettre du côté opposé un contrepoids proportionnel.”<sup>13</sup> That is not to say that they believe in a perfect equality between powers. The “*prétendue balance* entre les Maison d’Autriche et de Brandebourg” seems quite of an abomination, at least for Starhemberg, convinced with Kaunitz that sooner or later one of the two powers (Austria or Prussia) would win the upper hand (Szabo 2008, 428). Surprisingly, whether the topic goes on the partition of Poland, whether on Bavarian claims and Prussian ambitions, the French ambassador tells: “Je n’ai point pu m’empêcher d’admirer cette *prévoyance* politique et surtout la *moderation*.”

This raises the question of a hypothetical “Austrian Diplomatic Model” in the second half of the eighteenth century. The Court of Brussels, because international politics lay behind its evolution, may be regarded as

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<sup>10</sup> Lettre de Lesseps à Bernis du 27 novembre 1757, A.A.É., C.P., P.B., vol. 147, f.213-213v.

<sup>11</sup> Lettre de Vergennes à Adhémar du 4 janvier 1776, A.A.É., C.P., P.B., vol. 170, f.303-303v.

<sup>12</sup> Lettre d’Adhémar à Vergennes du 10 juillet 1782, A.A.É., C.P., P.B., vol. 173, f.84-84v.

<sup>13</sup> Lettre d’Adhémar à Vergennes du 2 septembre 1778, A.A.É., C.P., P.B., vol. 171, f.81-82v.

the meeting place of different diplomatic influences. The French prestige is undeniable in the European Enlightenment (Fumaroli 2001). Nevertheless, some Anglo-Saxon historians underline the existence of an “Austrian-Style Negotiation,” in which the Chancellor Kaunitz would be a pillar (Anderson 2000, 200). This outstanding statesman is responsible for the formulation of Austrian policy during a half-century. He is the mastermind behind the “Diplomatic Revolution.” Maria Theresa reposed her trust in her *Staatskanzler*. Even his greatest enemy, Frederick II of Prussia, admires this man “so superficial in his private life, but so profound in his politics” (Szabo 1994).

According to the historian Szabo, Kaunitz sees himself as a *philosophe* and a leader of the Enlightenment in the Habsburg Monarchy. His own theories on international relations are partly exposed in an essay on the “équilibre des puissances de l’Europe.”<sup>14</sup>

The first condition is that “aucun individu ne pourra jamais attenter à la propriété d’un autre.” Kaunitz insists that the state is not above the law and that private property should not be threatened by authoritarian dictates (despite his strong commitment to absolutism). No sovereignty should be attacked, even “une propriété quelconque.”

The reason is not the balance. The chancellor does not believe in equilibrium. For this representative of the top the Ancient World, this concept is not conceivable and has to be abandoned: “Elle [l’égalité] est aussi impossible que l’égalité des facultés physiques et morales entre tous les individus.” Kaunitz proposes a distinct principle: “*Quod tibi non vis fieri alteri ne feceris.*”<sup>15</sup> In addition to this respectful reciprocity, solidarity and protection between powers are required (Scott 1990).

This position is probably slightly different from what is highlighted by some in Versailles. Under the influence of thinkers such as Saint-Pierre, encouraged by the British diplomats, the balance of power is not taken as a naïve and purely idealistic motif. A renewed European states system should be regulated by justice and equity, with France as the arbitrator (Antoine 2006, 298–403). Vergennes and Louis XVI felt the late eighteenth-century France was a “satisfied power” (Soutou 2010). That is at least what they want us to believe. What a dramatic contrast with the *realpolitik* practiced by the other powers (England and Prussia).

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<sup>14</sup> Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (H.H.St.A.), *Staatskanzlei, Vorträge*, 134/D/222-5. (See Szabo 1979, 399–408).

<sup>15</sup> i.e. “What you do not wish to have done to you, do not do unto others.”

## Conclusion

One has observed that an *Assecuratio Pacis* had been experienced in the Austrian Netherlands by the mid-eighteenth century. In a broader context, it owes to the principles of the Westphalian (1648) and Utrecht (1713) peaces and presents similarities with the following Vienna Congress spirit (1815) (Babel 2005, 2000, May 2012). The balance of power raises two questions: “why to do” and “how to do.” The history of the Belgian space is one of the many possible answers to these two issues.

The Southern Netherlands had been an object of passion between the Great Powers. From 1714 to 1795, these regions were part of the multicultural and exploded mosaic of the Habsburg Empire. The Austrian supervision did not exclude a relative autonomy, at least their own status, attested by the presence of diplomats in Brussels. Belgian provinces, far from the center of Vienna, difficult to defend, represent an important aspect of the eighteenth-century internationalist practice. What matters is not the power of this region in itself but its international value.

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