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peaceInstitute

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“It is not only the role of the Flemish Peace Institute to inform public and political debate, but it is also intrinsically important that politicians can intervene and devise measures on the basis of correct information,,

Tomas Baum,
director

In a column for MO
in January 2015*

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FOREWORD

PEACE AND SECURITY are under pressure. In our globalised world, conflicts not only take place at the other end of the world, but also strike at the heart of our society. The figures speak for themselves: 42 international conflicts are currently raging, with an estimated 1.5 billion people living in fragile states or conflict areas, and the number of deaths as a result of armed violence has more than tripled since 2008. The world seems adrift.

People around the world are working hard to turn the tide, but their efforts seem insufficient. Recent foreign interventions aimed at creating more peace and security have been unsuccessful. “Peace-building” is in crisis, and the legitimacy and relevance of the United Nations are being questioned. These developments, which have proved detrimental for peace and security, have contributed to the largest flow of refugees since World War II. These displaced people are not only seeking protection in their own region, but are also migrating to Europe, where they hope to find a safe place to live and a decent life.

What does this all mean for us? Can we allow ourselves to reduce our work for peace and security to simply maintaining the existing order? How can we eliminate the real sources of dissatisfaction? How far does our responsibility extend? These are questions we simply cannot ignore. Our actions or our lack of action will shape the future, because there are no natural laws that determine the course of history.

Based on our history, it makes sense to use freedom as a starting point and the notion of peace as a horizon, both globally and locally. In practice, this means maintaining the democratic decision-making process, guaranteeing respect for the rule of law and strengthening international law. There is a very limited margin for the use of force or violence here. These can only be instruments within legitimate legal and political frameworks – when all consultation has been exhausted, or is simply impossible.

Policy-makers thereby face enormous challenges. Peace and security continue to be a cause for international concern, but what seemed to have been long achieved within the European cocoon has recently also started to crumble. In this turbulent context, it is more vital than ever to maintain an overview, conduct analyses and take well-thought-out and sustainable measures. Within the wide range of peace issues that our society is currently facing, the Flemish Peace Institute aims to make a contribution in different domains.

Arms are one of these domains. These are deadly instruments of violence, which are essential in the hands of democratically-controlled security and defence services, and are legitimate in civilian hands under certain conditions. But they also constitute a real risk and, in the wrong hands, seriously compromise people's safety.

“By co-organizing this yearly COARM-NGO conference, the Flemish Peace Institute clearly shows its added value in bringing the world into the Flemish Parliament and in offering a platform for experts, policy makers and civil society to meet and to discuss issues of peace and security,,

Rik Daems,
Flemish MP,
Chairman of the Committee
for Foreign Policy

*During the opening address
to the COARM NGO conference
in June 2015 in the Flemish Parliament*

Weapons are an important security issue both abroad – with regard to arms exports – and at home, for example, in the framework of combating terrorism or preventing deaths by firearms. In the past year, the Flemish Peace Institute has continued its impartial analysis of the Flemish, Belgian and European arms export policy, and has conducted ground-breaking work on the role and impact of firearms in our society.

In 2015, the political and social debate also inspired the Flemish Peace Institute to concentrate on the study of (de)radicalization. Thorough analyses and advice on this topic require time and resources, and the Institute will make these available in the following years.

As far as peace and security and our foreign policy are concerned, the Flemish Peace Institute has taken a powerful first step, paving the way for the Government of Flanders. The Institute wants to help create a structural peace dimension in Flemish foreign policy. The government and parliament first need to make a number of committed political choices, however.

With regard to our past, the government has made a clear decision to focus on peace by establishing a Flemish remembrance project for the Centenary of the Great War that conveys a clear message of peace. The Flemish Peace Institute provided guidance on a historically responsible approach to our past that mirrors the “polyphony” of our history. This approach continues to be key, also in relation to other difficult episodes of our history.

After ten years, we felt this was a good opportunity to review and update the format of our annual report. Readers will first be able to read a number of thematic contributions by the Institute’s staff. The report also contains an overview of the operation, activities and publications of the Flemish Peace Institute, and the evaluation of this work by an international scientific advisory council. The financial activities of 2015 are discussed in a separate parliamentary document (Document 48 – Accounts of the Flemish Institute for Peace and the Prevention of Violence).

In 2015, a lot of strategic thought went into the further development of the Institute’s activities. Priorities for the following years are a broadening of the themes, a more participatory approach to research, and more intensive collaboration and coordination with the Flemish Parliament and local, regional, national, European and international policy-makers.

Many stakeholders are working to maintain peace and freedom in our society, i.e. the government, civil society and civilians. Parliament plays a key role in the heart of our pacification democracy. The Flemish Peace Institute finds it important that the parliament also fully exercises its core duties - conducting political debates, issuing Decrees and controlling the government – with regard to peace and the prevention of violence, both here and in the rest of the world. The availability of reliable information is thereby crucial.

Tomas Baum, *Director*

De-radicalization policy: A lever, or an obstacle to shared citizenship?

The Brussels attacks confronted us directly with the violence that can be caused by Belgian fighters in Syria and their network. We suddenly

found ourselves facing two pressing questions: why have hundreds of Belgians gone to fight in Syria, and how were they able to stage an attack here? In the case of the second question, all eyes are on the Belgian security policy.

A vigorous, yet vital debate is currently raging on how the Belgian security services can better collect information and carry out intervention.

The first question, as to why so many Belgians leave to fight in Syria or join Daesh, examines the roots of terrorism, and brings us into the complex debate about radicalization and the many diverse factors that feed this process.

LORE
COLAERT



IN 2015, THE GOVERNMENT of Flanders drafted a 21-page action plan for the detection and prevention of radicalization. In so doing, the government joined other European countries that have developed a policy for dealing with radicalization and foreign fighters. The forerunners of the “de-radicalization policy” are Denmark, the Netherlands and Great Britain, with the latter even having a minister for countering terrorism. Nine cities in Flanders have since appointed a specialised “de-radicalization official”, and the number of helplines and contact centres for radicalization is increasing every day. The government supports a number of de-radicalization projects, and all kinds of organizations are training front-line workers to recognize and deal with signs of radicalization.

The potential risk factors for radicalization are complex, and there are still a lot of unanswered questions. Someone who engages in terrorism has generally been through a long process, and the underlying causes of radicalization are not that easy to pinpoint, but include psychological vulnerability, crime or other deviant behaviour, and family problems, as well as relative deprivation and problems with identity-building. There are also several religious and ideological aspects to radicalization. As long as the exact role of each of these elements remains unclear, we must remain cautious. The temptation to pinpoint just one cause is substantial, however: some think that the cause is structural deprivation, while others point to Islam as the culprit.

The profiles of the Syria fighters are very diverse, in terms of both their education and employment. As a result, the Flemish action plan concludes that radicalization “cannot merely be attributed to poverty or social-economic deprivation.” Some researchers have interpreted the diversity of the profiles in a different way, as an example of the well-known paradox that the more integrated an individual is, the more they will suffer when confronted with exclusion. Whether an extremist form of Islam is the cause of the radicalization or simply adds a veneer of legitimacy after recruitment is the subject of an ongoing debate.

There is a growing consensus, however, that a major push factor for radicalization is a sense of isolation, frustration, of not being part of society, or not having a future for all kinds of – rightly or wrongly perceived – reasons. Consequently, a preventative policy should aim to keep people on board with society.

The unease that surrounds the issue of radicalization is significant. And it is now also compounded by the fear inspired by the terrorists on the streets of Paris and Brussels. We should not, however, avoid the debate about the breeding ground of radicalization. After 22/3, it seems even more difficult to muster up the courage to analyse how it came to this. On the other hand, maybe the time has come for a thorough self-examination.

Unintended consequences

A look at the Flemish de-radicalization policy shows us that a preventative answer to the problem of radicalization involves many domains, namely education, welfare, employment, integration, youth work, faith and ideology. An integrated approach is indeed recommended, meaning that various domains have to work together. Moreover, this should include both comprehensive and more targeted prevention. Comprehensive prevention tackles all possible aspects of the breeding ground in order to prevent large numbers of people from being susceptible to radicalization. Specific prevention targets radicalizing individuals, in order to prevent them from resorting to violence.

In the best case scenario, the integrated nature of a de-radicalization policy and the sense of urgency about foreign fighters will function as a wake-up call for policy-makers. The time has come to check whether the existing policy promotes shared citizenship or not, and how it can be adapted to the reality of the super-diverse – but also divided and unequal – society that present-day Flanders has become.

The integrated nature of this de-radicalization policy also involves a risk, however. Good regular policy is the basis for the comprehensive prevention of any form of radicalization. If, however, regular policy is uniformly used as an instrument for the specific prevention of violent Jihadism, then it may have unintended detrimental consequences, such as growing distrust and polarization. In order to understand these unintended consequences, we have to examine in more detail what exactly the de-radicalization policy is trying to tackle.

The Flemish action plan does not contain a definition of the problem of “radicalization”. The text starts from the specific issue of the foreign fighters in Syria, however. Nor does penal law give a definition of radicalization, as (political or religious) radicalism is not yet a crime. It can be channelled in a positive manner, for example into social engagement, or in a negative manner, for example, (inciting people to engage) in violence. The federal action plan with regard to radicalization does, however, contain a description of radicalization. It is a “process that influences an individual or a group in such a way that the individual or the group is mentally prepared to engage in extremist actions, including violent or even terrorist actions.” It is therefore a process that may possibly culminate in violent behaviour.

The specific preventative policy aims to intervene in this process as early as possible. To this end, signs of radicalization must be detected and reported in a targeted manner, by security services and policemen who know their neighbourhood, but schools, youth centres and religious associations also have a responsibility. This cooperation between the security services and social services is vital, as with any other case of transgressive behaviour, such as domestic violence.

The concept of “radicalization” continues to be a slippery slope, however: behaviour and ideas are assessed to see what are the chances that they might culminate in violent or terrorist actions. This requires a risk assessment that is far from evident, in view of the complex, underlying causes of radicalization. The alarm bells are therefore

sometimes sounded too early in this field, with people responding to an “urge to take action”. Targeted prevention thereby always involves the risk of unjustified intervention. Well-known examples include the cases of youngsters of immigrant origin who are wrongly arrested because a “vigilant citizen” reported them. But teachers also may find it difficult not to confuse the external displays of adherence to Islam with signs of radicalization. Following reports by teachers about students, but also, for example, reports about Islamic teachers, an intervention can sometimes take place, at school or at home, sometimes even involving various security services. Even if the report was unjustified, the student and his family, or the Islamic teacher, will still bear the stigma. Reporting too readily and intervening too quickly may therefore increase the distrust between citizens and the authorities, and between citizens and other citizens. An important point for attention in this specific preventative policy is that such measures should be discreet, proportionate and targeted, and that follow-up care must be provided to those who were wrongly targeted.

This specific preventative policy does not replace the comprehensive prevention that aims to reduce risk factors, however. If the specific de-radicalization policy targets groups as a whole, this might increase the breeding ground for radicalization, and thereby play into the hands of those who legitimize terrorism. In practice, this means that when young people as a group, or an entire neighbourhood, or all Muslims or people of immigrant origin are now approached in order to protect them against radicalization, this may rather blow up bridges than build. Especially if these groups already feel that the same policy-makers have let them down for years.

When comprehensive prevention is narrowed down to specific prevention, this may complicate the regular policy. Youth and social-cultural work, domains that are traditionally considered to be the vanguard for tackling the risk factors of radicalization, can certainly use all the project funding they can get in times where public funding is tight. This leads to the situation on which social-cultural organizations end up having to compete with each other in order to maintain their activities using the project funding for de-radicalization. Moreover, since they must prove that their target audience is at risk of radicalization, this may in turn be detrimental to the trust they established with young people or families.

In other words, a de-radicalization policy that narrows down regular policy to simply detecting potentially violent behaviour may enhance polarization. It promotes distrust: among citizens themselves, between citizens and the government, and between the government and citizens. Anti-Islam demonstrations in Brussels, youngsters in Molenbeek who no longer dare to state their place of residence on their résumé, students who accuse each other of not being good Muslims. These are just a few, very diverse examples of the growing polarization.

It is obvious that the Flemish de-radicalization policy is not responsible for this polarization. The questions of whether this de-radicalization policy fuels polarization or whether it connects people, however remains. The specific preventative policy wants to prevent people from engaging in terrorism, but the comprehensive preventative policy

has another goal, namely to keep everyone on board with society. The de-radicalization policy must therefore not only be assessed in terms of the number of foreign fighters and terrorists. We must also examine how it contributes to making all citizens feel at home in our society. We should, for example, ask ourselves how young people experience and perceive this de-radicalization policy.

Normal policy, adapted to diversity

There is another reason for not narrowing down comprehensive prevention to the detection, reporting and intervention in cases of violent radicalization. The specific de-radicalization policy does not offer an answer to the wider challenge that arises in many discussions and trainings about radicalization, namely the challenge of dealing with diversity.

Some forms of behaviour or ideas are not violent. They do, however, cause societal problems. Teachers, for example, are confronted with heated classroom discussions about the Middle East, with conflicts about faith and ideology, or with racism. They are also looking at how parents of immigrant origin can participate more in what goes on at school. The diverse points of view in asylum centres regarding the conflict in Syria must be channelled so they do not spiral out of control, and an attempt is also being made to discuss relationships between men and women. Within the Muslim community, ways are now being sought to better align activities in mosques so they appeal more to young people. People are also discussing the opportunities for a more “moderate” Islam.

These types of social challenge are not solved by simply reporting someone to the security services, but front-line workers have to deal with them on a daily basis. The unease about radicalization is so substantial, however, that people tend to feel a certain “reticence” when it comes to taking action. Teachers, for example, are wary about using their general expertise in terms of conflict management – gained in the context of existing policy plans regarding bullying or violence – when it comes to these sensitive themes.

The debate about radicalization has exposed a number of wider dynamics, to which public policy should provide an answer. But the time is possibly right to hold the very relevant discussions about these social conflicts outside the specific debate about the foreign fighters. The same applies to measures such as a social-cultural work programme for young adults in deprived neighbourhoods, or measures against discrimination, school drop-out and unemployment among young people from an immigrant background. These structural measures are all vital for community building. That is why they hopefully do not depend on fragmented project funds and the emphasis on the acute problem of the foreign fighters. The sense of urgency will weaken if Daesh’s tentacles are pushed back in the long term. If we do not tackle the community problems in Flanders, however, we will create major problems for the next generations. A wider breeding ground will continue to exist until a new pull factor arises, when a new fight inspires our youngsters to take up arms.

One of the projects of the widespread de-radicalization policy in Flanders consists of developing a counter-discourse, e.g. about a “Euro-Islam”, to convince young people about the value of democracy. It is a fact that citizenship is not genetic, but must be

taught and maintained. But before we launch such an initiative, should we not start by thinking about the possible shortcomings of today's democracy? What does democracy really mean for those who are at risk of turning their backs on it, and what *could* it represent for them? The chances of success of such a counter-discourse will depend on the perceived sincerity of this democracy.

What answer can the government offer to radicalization and polarization? The right answer to transgressive behaviour is, of course, an efficient security policy. Specific prevention is also necessary, but in a proportionate and targeted manner. A more comprehensive preventative policy must limit the breeding ground for radicalization. If some aspects risk increasing this breeding ground when the preventative policy is too specifically focused on a certain form of radicalization, we must be cautious. But given that there are so many diverse risk factors, we should neither ignore opportunities. That is why Flanders must continue to invest in the fabric that holds our community together, such as education, wellbeing, youth, housing and employment.

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FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES 2015

24/02/2015

Lecture on violence and peace in the Kinsbergen Chair - Studium Generale lecture series of the Artesis Plantijn University College of Antwerp

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03/04/2015

Lecture "Dealing with conflicts" in the GO! Atheneum in Oudenaarde

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02/10/2015

Lecture "Urban conflict in capital cities" at the University of Pretoria

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21-23/10/2015

Host of the "Conflict Matters" conference of the Evens Foundation in Brussels

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FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS 2015

Advice on how to deal with urban riots

07/01/2015

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Dealing with radicalization – four reflections on Flemish radicalization policy (report)

Jorg Kustermans

24/03/2015

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*“I hope that the events
of the past months
will serve as
a wake-up call
for Belgian and
European politicians,,*

Nils Duquet,
researcher

*The fight against illicit arms trafficking,
broadcast on Flemish Radio 1 in August 2015.*



The market for illicit firearms under scrutiny

In a certain sense, 2015 was the “year of firearms” for the Flemish Peace Institute. Arms, and more specifically firearms were at the centre of attention

as a result of the institute’s own pioneering work in research into firearms and of terrorist acts of violence making the news. Nils Duquet, researcher at the institute, has been specialising in this matter for some years.

“In addition to our research into the foreign arms trade, we have also started to study the theme of firearms in more detail in recent years: the Belgian Weapons Act, facts and figures, the illegal market ... There was little to no non-partisan expertise on this subject in our country. And yet this is vital in order to be able to roll out a policy to control the possession, the trade and the use of firearms that is based on correct information. This control is necessary in order to limit the substantial safety risks involved with such potentially deadly products. In the past, the government’s policy efforts often overshot the objective. After a shooting incident measures are quickly implemented, but these do not always prove to be effective.”

AN INTERVIEW WITH
NILS DUQUET

This was also the case in 2015, when it became clear yet again that firearms have become the instrument of choice of terrorists to sow the seeds of terror and death.

Which impact did this have?

“After the attack on Charlie Hebdo, among others, in January, on the Thalys in August, and especially after the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November, the topic of firearms in our society is once again on the table. We were flooded by national, and especially international media coverage on this topic in 2015. From Al Jazeera to the BBC and American radio stations, and even Japanese newspapers. Everyone wanted to know how and where these terrorists acquired their heavy weaponry. Moreover, the link with Belgium drew attention to the reputation of our country as a hub for illicit arms.”

And is this indeed the case?

“Belgium is a European hub, not the hub. Wherever there is serious crime, there is also an illicit firearms market. This is mainly the case in large cities. Not just in Brussels, but also in Marseille, Amsterdam or Athens. Terrorists also obtain their firearms on this criminal market. It is no coincidence that almost all the perpetrators of these attacks have a criminal past. They have the connections and enjoy the trust needed to buy arms from these sources. You or I cannot just walk up to someone at Brussels-Midi railway station and buy a Kalashnikov. You need to have established a relationship of trust with members of criminal networks for this.”

You referred to Marseille, Athens and other large European cities. Is this a European problem?

“The illicit trafficking of arms is the perfect example of a cross-border problem. Although the notion of borders within the EU is relative, of course. There is free movement of goods within the Schengen zone, so illicit arms can circulate easily within the EU. The illegal market is supplied by various sources, through theft or export fraud but the main source for heavy weapons is the Balkans. When Yugoslavia fell apart in the Nineties, this gave rise to serious conflicts, and many people did not hand in their arms at the end of these civil wars. These arms are now gradually being sold and enter the EU, often in small quantities, smuggled in car boots. Once in the EU, they become a European problem, instead of a national one.”

Did the attacks of 2015 have an impact on the European firearms policy?

“On the European level, the recent terror threat – and more specifically the fact that terrorists are increasingly turning to firearms – was a catalyst for all kinds of policy measures. In the first instance, governments tend to respond by tightening laws. The European Commission accelerated the process for amending the EU Firearms Directive, which has already been submitted to the European Parliament. After incidents, governments tend to choose the relatively easy solution of tightening laws. This also happened in Belgium after Hans Van Temsche’s raid in Antwerp in 2006. Don’t get me wrong. It is important to make sure that laws are water-tight, and this also applies in the fight against the illicit arms trade. The stronger the legal framework, the clearer and the more

definitive is the boundary between what is legal and illegal. This boundary allows us to focus on the illicit trade, and to avoid the leaking of arms from the legal into the illegal circuit. But legislation alone is not sufficient.”

What else can governments do?

“We need to have a much better understanding of the problem in order to facilitate a targeted approach against the illicit firearms market. How many illicit arms are in circulation? Which sources supply this illegal market? Which crimes are perpetrated with which arms? At the moment, the answers to these questions are very fragmented. So those responsible need to make clear progress with the collection, exchange and analysis of the available data. Police services are a crucial factor in this framework.

One can then roll out an approach based on a proper understanding of the issue. A vital aspect of this is the strengthening of the operational capacity of competent services and the stimulation of cooperation between the various stakeholders, across various borders. The illicit arms trade is a cross-border activity, so, by definition, it also requires a cross-border approach.”

The emphasis is very specifically on the fight against terror. Do illicit firearms in the hands of terrorists also cause the most victims?

“Let me start by setting something straight: Illicit firearms are not used in every terror attack per se. Take Anders Breivik for example. The arms he used in Utoya in 2011 were arms that he legally owned as a hunter and a recreational shooter.

While terror is currently a growing and real security risk, most deaths by fire-

arms do not happen during attacks or mass shootings. On average, 6,500 people die every year in the EU as a result of shooting injuries, of which 1,000 were murders. The remainder are suicides. We have no idea how many legal or illicit firearms are involved in this. It is important to remember, however, that these are not just confrontations among criminals, but also relate to domestic violence. So it is important to take this broader perspective into account when implementing new rules.”

Does the new EU legislation that is about to be enacted take this into account?

“Well, it is true that terrorism has accelerated the process of amending the European Firearms Directive, but this had already been prepared for quite some time. The Firearms Directive stimulates a common, shared European firearms policy. The idea is above all to strengthen the legal framework and ensure it is watertight. But as I already said, this is also a first, important step in tackling the spread of illicit firearms.

Most of these European measures will improve control of the possession, the trade and the use of firearms. I’m thinking of common standards for the deactivation of firearms, better marking and better registration rules, for example. These measures have a general effect, but can also specifically limit terrorists’ access to firearms. Let’s not forget that Coulibaly – who attacked the Jewish supermarket in January 2015 – used previously deactivated firearms that had been purchased legally in Slovakia. Someone had apparently succeeded in reversing the deactivation process after purchase, so the firearm could be used again. This shows that Europe needs to enact the same strict rules for deactivation as soon as possible.”

FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES 2015

28/01/2015

Contribution about the illegal arms trade during an event in the European Parliament on the terrorist threat in Europe

27/03/2015

Expert seminar "Guns and governance" organised with PRIO and Bradford University in the Flemish Parliament

21/04/2015

Lecture on the European arms trade organised by Vredesactie in Antwerp

29/05/2015

Host of the annual COARM/NGO conference, in cooperation with the European Commission and Saferworld in the Flemish Parliament

03/06/2015

Panel discussion "Targeted action: understanding gun violence and developing policy aimed at preventing gun violence and coping with its consequences" at the United Nations Headquarters in New York

25/06/2015

Seminar "Firearms and Violent Deaths in Europe" in the Flemish Parliament

13/07/2015

Contribution to the Fourth Consultative Meeting of the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium in Brussels on "Terrorism threats to EU internal and external security from illicit trafficking of SALW"

04/11/2015

Contribution to the "Current security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina" conference (UNDP, OSCE, DCAF and NATO) in Vitez

05/11/2015

Guest lecture "Firearms and violent deaths in Europe" at the University of Sarajevo

17/11/2015

Seminar "The future of nuclear (dis) armament", organised with SIPRI in the Flemish Parliament

04/12/2015

Slotwoord op de Politeia Studiedag 'Politiebewapening' in Mechelen

08/12/2015

Guest lecture "Arms trade: the rules of the game" at the University of Antwerp

What will be the impact of the new European rules on Flemish weapons owners?

"The bar is already quite high in our country, for example, with the Weapons Act of 2006. Belgium also has a good reputation in terms of the deactivation of arms: The Belgian Proof House in Liège applies high standards. Hunters and recreational shooters may well feel the consequences, for example, as a result of the new rules about the registration of firearms. And there is one aspect in the proposal that the European Commission has submitted to the European Parliament that might really have a significant impact, and is rather controversial, namely the ban on certain semi-automatic weapons that are similar to automatic weapons. Just think of semi-automatic Kalashnikovs, for example. The European Commission may be overshooting a bit here. Firstly, "similar to" is a very vague notion, and clear criteria would be needed. Secondly, one should probably start by making an assessment of the impact of such a rule. For example, the extent to which such legal, semi-automatic arms really constitute a security risk is not clear. Clarity on this is necessary to avoid becoming bogged down in symbolic policies. It is likely that this measure will not be retained in the final amendment of the Firearms Directive."

What do you think are the greatest challenges for the future when it comes to firearms?

"In terms of legislation, I think most European countries, including Belgium, are okay. Barring a few details, we have a solid Weapons Act that limits the possession of firearms to those who have a reason for owning or carrying them, and who know how to use them responsibly. This is

important, because our research has shown that a strict weapons act really does have a positive impact: we not only see fewer deaths by firearms, but violent deaths in general are also significantly lower now.

I believe that the greatest challenges relate to the fight against the illicit arms trade, which brings me back to two elements that I mentioned earlier: we need to better understand the scope and specific nature of the problem and we need to strengthen the operational capacity and cooperation. The Flemish Peace Institute will focus on mapping the illicit arms trade in the next years, in Flanders, Belgium and wider Europe. I'm thinking of the supply of illicit firearms, the various parties who buy them, the prices, the numbers, and so on. We hope to help contain a real security risk in our society with policy-oriented scientific research."

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FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS 2015

Illegal firearms in Belgium
(fact sheet)

[15/01/2015](#)

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Gun control in Belgium (report)
Nils Duquet and Maarten Van Alstein

[03/03/2015](#)

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The impact of arms legislation on mortality in Belgium (fact sheet)

[04/03/2015](#)

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Advice concerning the yearly report of the Government of Flanders on the Flemish foreign arms trade in 2013

[05/03/2015](#)

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Firearms and violent deaths in Europe
(report)

Nils Duquet & Maarten Van Alstein

[25/06/2015](#)

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Firearms and deaths by firearms in Europe (documentary clip)

[25/06/2015](#)

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Firearms and deaths by firearms in the EU (fact sheet)

[25/06/2015](#)

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SIPRI Yearbook 2012 – Summary in Dutch (report)

[30/09/2015](#)

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Flemish foreign arms trade 2014
(report)

Sara Depauw & Nils Duquet

[17/12/2015](#)

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Advice concerning the yearly report of the Government of Flanders on the Flemish foreign arms trade in 2014

[17/12/2015](#)

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The Centenary of the Great War. The half-way mark of the remembrance period

A remarkable concert took place in Flagey in Brussels on 21 April 2015. To commemorate the Great War, Dirk Brossé, Jef Neve and Sioen created a “mosaic of

unique atmospheres, moving emotions and refined timbres” in “Distortion, a Hymn to Liberty”. In the run-up to the Centenary of the Great War, the Government of Flanders had commissioned these artists to compose a work for a remembrance concert. The objective was to “stir people’s hearts and elicit emotions. We want to raise people’s awareness and make them understand. To honour the memory of those who died, and as a reminder for those who commemorate the war.”

MAARTEN
VAN ALSTEIN



THE ENTIRE CONCERT was dedicated to war, peace and freedom. Dirk Brossé composed an ode to peace (*Pace*) and set a poem by the Dadaist Tristan Tzara to music “to highlight the absurdity of the root causes of many wars.” He also performed Alfred Bryan’s song “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” as the “personification of all mothers whose sons are sacrificed in a war. Sometimes as heroes, usually as victims.” Jef Neve set to work with the questions that were raised at the end of the war: “Were soldiers able to cast off their helmets forever and return home? Were terrified citizens able to leave their safe haven forever?” The singer-songwriter Sioen composed six songs for the concert, “not from a distant or reflective perspective, but inspired by the emotions that a human would experience during a war.” *Distortion*, for example, touches upon the traumatic impact of war. In *My Last Post*, a soldier writes a last letter to his loved one, while *Over the Hills* ends with the phrase, “Let’s defuse the bomb once and for all”.

Flanders is investing heavily in the remembrance project for the “Centenary of the Great War”. It has completed major infrastructure works and has provided lavish funding to stakeholders in the remembrance sector (museums, civil society organizations, tourism stakeholders and so on). The Government of Flanders is also positioning itself on the international stage with this theme. The government itself, however, has only initiated and organized a few remembrance ceremonies, choosing instead to mobilize the stakeholders in the field. In that sense, “*Distortion, a Hymn to Liberty*” was an important official Flemish remembrance initiative. States often tend to give the armed forces a starring role in their remembrance ceremonies. Flanders, which, as a sub-state actor, does not have its own army, chose a more artistic statement instead, organising an “experience-oriented event”.

There were so many initiatives in the first two years of this centenary commemoration that it was hard to keep track of them, from artistic to historic and ceremonial, at the local, national or international level. So we should be cautious in making univocal assessments of the direction taken by all these initiatives. But if we take a sample of these initiatives, it is easy to see that they all have a common denominator, and the remembrance concert of the Government of Flanders is a good example. The general narrative inspiring the commemoration up until now touches upon themes such as the senselessness of this war, the victimization of soldiers and civilians, and the lingering trauma. The brief impression of the official commemorative hymn in Flagey is self-explanatory in that sense. The discourse of absurdity, victimization and trauma is often conveyed very bluntly, in one message: No more war!

“No more war”, who can object to this? From a moral standpoint, the pacifist nature of our war remembrance project is obviously easy to endorse. A commemoration that focuses on peace is undeniably valuable, and can make an important contribution to our society, both at the local and the global level. The question remains, however, whether we are making the most of the potential of a peace-oriented commemoration by unilaterally focussing on the assumed senselessness and trauma of WWI in order to launch a utopian call for eternal peace. In light of this question, I have two critical

remarks regarding the pacifist war remembrance project that was developed in Flanders in recent years. My objective thereby is to enhance the moral-political and educational potential of peace-oriented war remembrance projects.

Firstly, the narratives that take precedence in the Flemish commemoration initiatives are far too one-sided from a historical perspective. They do not fully highlight the complexity of the history of WWI. In fact, they downplay it. If we are to really learn from history – especially with the idea of peace in mind – we must be able to discuss every aspect of it. And this means taking into account the unruly nature of war history. It means taking into account things we would prefer not to hear, or which make us feel uncomfortable. Things that might seem to conflict with the well-known story of an absurd and traumatising war. For example, think of the historic observation that the war did indeed have a meaning for many people at the time. Think of the many artists and intellectuals during the Belle Époque who *were fascinated with violence, a fascination that they did not all relinquish during – or even after – the war*. Think of how violence could become a routine for soldiers, or of the fact that ordinary people, like you and me, were capable of horrific violence. And think of the colonial dimensions of this war, which continue to determine the order of things even today. While from a historical perspective the bigger picture may be complex and difficult, it entails a more open approach to our history, and it also limits the risk of a one-sided instrumentalization of the past. Interpreting history unilaterally in light of a call to peace, implies using it in the same way as it would be used in a nationalistic discourse or war rhetoric.

Secondly, the one-sided victim rhetoric and the omnipresent emphasis on the meaninglessness of war threatens to undermine the critical potential of a commemoration such as that of the Great War. Standard formulas and standard messages that are reiterated time and again, slight variations notwithstanding, limit the relevance of our history and how we deal with it. The commemoration holds more critical potential than just quickly and uniformly proclaiming the “No More War” message. It can also tap into underlying sources and prompt critical questions and thoughts on what was, what is and what is yet to come. Many of the remembrance events tend to look at the past in horror, with pity, empathizing with the suffering, and we tend to pin our hopes, as in slogans, on a distant, peaceful future. If we take a more critical, less blinkered look at our complex past, however, we are suddenly confronted with questions and dilemmas that could help us gain an insight into how we could act today in relation to war and peace.

Take the war in Syria for example. A bloody, contemporary conflict, to which many of the current remembrance events did actually refer. The message was usually in line with the prevailing narrative: “The Great War was terrible and absurd, all wars are terrible and absurd, and so is the war in Syria. We should learn the following from the past namely No More War”. However valuable this message is, and however much we endorse it, how does it increase our understanding of what is happening in Syria today? How does this bring us closer to ideas for solutions?

FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES 2015

21/04/2015

Speech at the opening of "The Course of History" by Bart Michiels in the Concertgebouw in Bruges

24/04/2015

Lecture at the "A century of weapons of mass destruction: Enough!" conference of the City of Ypres and Mayors for Peace in Ypres

18/05/2015

Contribution to the "How to deal with the competition, confrontation and confusion of memories?" seminar of RCN Justice & Démocratie in Brussels

09/08/2015

Debate on the film "The Bomb" (about Hiroshima) in the Peace Centre in Antwerp

24/09/2015

Presentations of papers at the 9th Pan-European Conference on International Relations of the European International Studies Association in Sicily

01/10/2015

Lecture "Beyond the Great War: heritage and representation" at the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns in Pretoria

26/10/2015

Lecture "History from the grave: politics of memory in exhumations of mass graves from the Spanish Civil War" at the University of Leuven

10/11/2015

Remembrance Day lecture by Philipp Blom with concert by Het Collectief in Ypres, organised together with the In Flanders Fields Museum and the City of Ypres

17/11/2015

Lecture "History from the grave: politics of memory in exhumations of mass graves from the Spanish Civil War" at the "Post Mortem" exhibition in Ghent

FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS 2015

Remembrance Day Lecture

Philipp Blom

10/11/2015

A more profound look at our very complex history, on the other hand, not only raises more pertinent questions and dilemmas, it also promises to provide us deeper insights. For example, insights into what it is that encourages people to take up arms for an ideal and to fight till death. Into how structures can hold people captive in violent dynamics. More importantly, history also forces us to examine the difficult question of when a violent intervention might be justified, for example in the form of a humanitarian intervention or for fighting a threat like Daesh. When it raises such insights and dilemmas, history becomes more relevant to our contemporary times. And it possibly also makes us more capable of "learning from the past".

Using a complex interpretation of history in our remembrance and commemorative practice may not be the easiest approach. It raises the spectre of a painful past, of events that haunt us, and confront us with responsibility and guilt. But only by facing this complexity head on can we find inspiration today.

Although we have no crystal ball, and even though we are only at the halfway mark of this 2014-2018 remembrance period, we can already see the next commemorative period looming on the horizon. The bloody twentieth century will not let us go, even after 2018: the Treaty of Versailles, the Great Depression, the rise of Hitler, World War II ... In all probability, two narratives will rise to the fore. The first is that of the European Union springing up like a rose of peace from the devastation after World War II. The second is that of the West fighting for peace and freedom, "or we would all be Nazis now".

While these two narratives certainly contain significant elements of truth, they both threaten to ignore the complexity of history again – and thus the full critical potential of this difficult war legacy.

After two years of commemorating the Great War, we should recognize that Flanders did indeed develop a special project. How many other projects that are supervised by the government transcend the militaristic and nationalistic victory discourse? On the other hand, there is still a lot of margin for doing better, and for examining how we look at our violent past. Let us face that history head on. Until 2018 and beyond, the Flemish remembrance hymn shall hopefully sound a little more dissonant, unruly and disturbing.

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Flanders has a future as a peace entrepreneur

Peace and security. Governments like to cite these principles when substantiating their foreign policy. They are often referred to – almost on

auto pilot – as a vague motivation for political decisions, whether talking about the deployment of fighter aircraft or the evolution of our development cooperation. References to democratic values and the importance of the respect for human rights are included as an evidence in speeches about the past and present. The exact relationship between the actual decisions and the container concepts of peace and security is rarely explained, but is deemed obvious. Specific projects or grants - often ad hoc – must prove that the foreign policy as a whole is effectively designed to prevent violence, to promote conflict management and democratization, and so on. A fat cheque that is presented during a fundraiser for a humanitarian crisis that garners a lot of attention is a typical example of this.

WIES
DE GRAEVE

IT IS MUCH less evident to give peace and conflict a real and structural place in the policy of a region or a country. Vague objectives are difficult to operationalize. On the other hand, there are many practical, economic and other objectives that stand between the dream and the act of working for peace. And yet, a new, innovative and sustainable approach is necessary. In that sense, 2015 was a low point at many levels in terms of peace and security. On a global scale, Arab uprisings have set the Middle East alight, while the tension between the Western world and Russia is growing, and Africa continues to struggle with persistent conflict. In Mexico, criminal violence causes just as many (innocent) fatalities as a regular war, while tensions are rising in South-East Asia over decades-old territorial issues. Locally, the threat of terrorism has brought violence alarmingly close to home, while the rift between ethnic, religious and social groups continues to grow and a massive flood of refugees confronts us with the precarious global situation. It is clear why we should think about structural and sustainable solutions, at the global, European, national and regional levels.

At the international level, several efforts have been made in the past decades to structurally embed peace and security. Just think of the United Nations, the International Humanitarian Law or the EU's peace dimensions. There is even a real international peace architecture. These structures continue to make a difference to the lives of millions of people, even today. Unfortunately, they are not always capable of offering an answer to new challenges such as durable solutions to intra-state conflicts, regional tensions or transnational terrorism. The approach in the field is often not efficient enough, and is implemented by expats in secure compounds. It does not take sufficient account of local needs, and the stakeholders sometimes fall over each other's feet.

In Belgium, foreign policy mainly chooses to limit itself to general statements about peace and security. It is difficult to see how these concepts effectively influence policy, or give rise to a coherent vision and a well-developed strategy. A good example is the fate of the Peace-Building Service of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs. The service was established in 2006 to add a structural peace dimension to our foreign policy in the form of targeted, long-term project support. A look at the evolution of the budget for this service speaks volumes, however: the budget was reduced from 30 million euros in 2008 to 1 million euros in 2015. The service no longer exists today. Two officials are waiting for the completion of the last projects so that they can turn off the light. The service's budget has since been incorporated into a budget line that is available to the minister to grant ad hoc support to humanitarian projects. Which he, incidentally, does not fail to do, for example promising funding during a visit to a refugee camp on the Turkish-Syrian border under the watchful eye of the journalists who accompanied him on the trip.

As a Belgian federal entity, Flanders is not an island in the turbulent world in which we live. The way in which Flanders relates to the world affects the global situation. Vice versa, global security issues are now penetrating the regional level. The foreign policy of the Government of Flanders is based on the principle of "in foro interno, in foro

externo”: If Flanders has the competence for a matter within the Federal state of Belgium, it also holds the foreign responsibility for this matter. Economics, research, agriculture, education, mobility ... These policy areas all play an important and specific role in international relations. The Flemish policy is especially active in certain areas. Policy-makers mainly seem to invest in the region’s commercial and economic interests. While this benefits our region’s development, a fully-fledged foreign policy has a much greater scope.

In 2015, this ambition was interpreted as such by the Flemish Minister-President, Geert Bourgeois, who is also responsible for foreign policy. On the occasion of the Flemish public holiday, he announced that the current International Flanders service would be transformed into a full-fledged Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The idea is to streamline the “in foro interno, in foro externo principle”, under which certain ministers are also responsible for the foreign aspects of their powers, giving Flemish foreign policy, and by extension Flanders, a face of its own.

This could be a peaceful face. Inspired by its own regional history, Flanders pays particular attention to peace and conflict management in the policy it implements, both at home and abroad. This was a message that was frequently repeated during the commemoration of the Centenary of the Great War. Flanders strongly believes in a substantive remembrance project, with a clear peace message that also establishes a link between the present and future. Flanders thereby believes peace to be so important. The foundation of the Flemish Peace Institute - now a decade ago - is also a result of this sensitivity.

In order to define a structural peace dimension in its current, full-fledged foreign policy, Flanders needs to firmly base its policy on a dual foundation, which can take our region very far.

The first aspect of this is the structural incorporation of peace, security and conflict management across all policy areas on the basis of an explicit vision. From education, through economy and up to agriculture. Why not inject a structural peace dimension in the existing Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT) network? Or capitalize on the expertise in terms of conflict management available in international education networks? This comprehensive approach ties in with the establishment of a full-fledged Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Policy coordination from the peace perspective would be excellently suited to the new ministry. A developed basic vision on peace can form the comprehensive normative framework, the value framework needed for the further development of the Flemish foreign policy. The executive must commit to this, but, above all, also parliament and the wider society. A participatory process for establishing such a normative framework can significantly strengthen the body and the area of support for the Flemish foreign policy.

Such an approach also involves certain risks, however. A vague commitment can be limited to merely ticking off the boxes on a list of general points for attention. That is why a

structurally anchorage and coordination of the policy domains is necessary. A second pitfall is that the transposition of peace in all policy areas may become bogged down in a very broad concept of peace. The narrower definition of peacekeeping work, which is designed to solve or prevent violent conflicts, often also requires a specialist approach. And Flanders boasts several specialists in the fields of conflict management, diplomacy, trauma treatment or the construction of democratic state structures. That is why it is so important to also include the second aspect of the dual foundation.

The second aspect consists of adopting an own, specialised position in the broad and densely populated field of peace-building and conflict management. Thanks to its recognized specialization, Flanders can make the difference in specific interventions. Just think of the Netherlands' attention to human rights or the impact of the Norwegians when it comes to diplomatically resolving conflicts.

In 2015, the Flemish Peace Institute carried out a thorough examination of how Flanders develops and deploys its expertise related to peacebuilding and conflict management. This exercise was prompted by a request that the Institute received from the then Minister-President in 2014 to establish a blueprint for a "Flemish Trauma and Transformation Network". On 4 November 2013, the Minister-President had already announced that a network would be established for the global deployment of Flemish academic expertise in terms of trauma treatment, peace-building and conflict management. The public launch took place during an International Symposium organized by the Government of Flanders within the framework of the remembrance ceremonies for the Great War. It provided a platform for a number of Nobel Peace Prize laureates to discuss the role of science in trauma treatment and the transformation of societies. During the event, the importance of the launch was underscored by a memorandum of intent signed by a number of prominent guests, including Betty Williams, Frederik Willem de Klerk and Leymah Gbowee. There was therefore no lack of fanfare for the launch itself, but this does not mean that the network is up and running yet.

There are various options for the structural development of a Flemish niche in the domain of peace-building. The Flemish Peace Institute has developed one option, namely that of an expert network that capitalizes on its expertise by informing policy and engaging in specific interventions. The idea of experts who contribute to policy development regarding peace-building and conflict prevention is in keeping with the previously explained option of incorporating a peace policy across all policy areas. Moreover, an expert network can offer policy support and engage in academic diplomacy. Examples that come to mind include support for foreign (often economic) missions from a conflict management perspective. Or what about support for the Flemish diplomatic network to the EU, the OECD or the Council of Europe? The most practical and real mission of an expert network is to gather the available specific expertise and use it for international project-based interventions in the realm of conflict prevention and peace-building. This can include academic capacity-building, but also initiatives at the grassroots level. In this way, Flanders can send its sons and daughters to make a dif-

ference through their expertise, and play a supplementary role on the international peace scene.

Neither of these two options have been implemented yet. The government has yet to define a vision on peace that can be used as a normative framework for its foreign policy, nor has it rolled out a network that makes a real difference. So all we can do is wait and see where peace and security stand on the list of priorities. They score well when it comes to rhetoric, but there is still a question mark with regard to practice. Budgetary considerations are obviously an obstacle when developing a new policy, but, in this case, it is mainly a question of the manner in which the planned policy is shaped, i.e. the establishment of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In his policy letter on Foreign Policy for 2015-2016, Minister-President Geert Bourgeois announced that he would use the Flemish Peace Institute's work to examine how peace-building can be structurally incorporated in the Flemish foreign policy. The needs are high and the options are within hand's reach: a solid initiative would establish a link with the inspiration for peace in a distant past, as well as establishing Flanders' future reputation as a peace entrepreneur.

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FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES 2015

05/02/2015

Solemn session "Peace and democracy: Peaceful fighting?" in the Flemish Parliament

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18/02/2015

Presentation "Practical knowledge as a theory of war and peace" at ISA's 56th Annual Convention in New Orleans

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02/06/2015

Lecture "A Realist View: The Belgian Diplomatic Elite and the League of Nations" at the seminar on "International Law and Arbitration" at the University of Antwerp

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29/09/2015

Seminar 'Laying down arms: disarmament as a precondition for demobilization and re-integration in conflict areas' in the Flemish Parliament at the occasion of the Flemish Peace Week

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26/11/2015

Contribution to the conference "Towards an international Strategy against ISIS" in Brussels

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17/12/2015

Guest lecture "Ambiguity in international relations" at the University of Antwerp

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FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS 2015

Peaceful fighting – lecture
Hans Achterhuis

05/02/2015

—

Opinions on Defence: foreign missions and a European army (fact sheet)

25/01/2015

—

Peace-building and conflict prevention in Flemish foreign policy (report)

Didier Verbruggen

09/09/2015

—

THE FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE 2015

OVERVIEW IN FIGURES

16

Publications with research and advice

9

Activities organised with over 800 attendees

25

Substantive contributions to local and international fora

7

Newsletters to 1,500 contacts

17.837

Visits to www.vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu
(+33% compared to 2014)

64

Quotes in print media

43

Interviews on radio and TV

OVERVIEW ADVICES IN 2015

Advice on how to deal with urban riots [in Dutch] 07/01/2015

Advice concerning the yearly report of the Government of Flanders on the Flemish foreign arms trade in 2013 [in Dutch] 05/03/2015

Advice concerning the yearly report of the Government of Flanders on the Flemish foreign arms trade in 2014 [in Dutch] 17/12/2015

YEARLY EVALUATION REPORT 2015

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

The Scientific Council evaluates the quality of the research performed by the Flemish Peace Institute and gives the Board of Directors and the Scientific Secretariat advice on important research trends in the issues of peace and security.

At its meeting on 10 March, 2016, the Scientific Council decided to change its assessment procedure. Detailed comments on individual publications will be given at an earlier stage of the writing process so that the author(s) can still take these comments into account for the final version. The assessment of the final, published versions will focus on the overall relevance, also with a view to the broader context of the Institute's research stream. As in previous years, the Scientific Council encourages publications in external fora, but does not evaluate these. However, the Scientific Council took note of the generally high-quality of the publications by staff members of the Flemish Peace Institute.

While the present evaluation report relies on Institute publications as a measure of this quality, the Institute's own seminars and lectures, and contributions by its researchers at other events, are also key elements in its profile; so it is a positive development to see them increasing and broadening in range.

The assessment of the Scientific Council is structured by the four thematic clusters of the institute.

1. ARMS TRADE, PRODUCTION AND POSSESSION

Research on the arms trade and on arms production has been the Institute's core concern since its establishment. This is also reflected in the high number of publications in this area.

In 2015, the Institute published its report on the Flemish foreign arms trade in the previous year (2014; in Dutch) and an English translation of its report on the arms trade in 2013. These reports have been a unique and highly valuable resource for everyone interested in the development of the arms trade in Flanders. As a comprehensive collection of relevant facts and figures, they provide the basis for further research on the topic.

The Institute also published its annual advisory note on the Flemish arms trade, which has been an obligation under the founding decree. This year's note emphasizes

that several EU directives have been implemented in a way that has eased controls on exports more than the directives demand.

Both the reports and the advisory note also emphasize that the new Flemish decree of 2012 has reduced the amount of information that is publicly available, for example, on end-users. The Scientific Council notes that the new decree of 2012 therefore also impacts on the comparability of data on Flemish arms trade, which may ultimately require a revision of the annual report's structure.

Over the last couple of years, the Institute has invested time and resources into research on firearms in Belgium and the European Union. The two reports published on this subject in 2015 demonstrate that this investment has paid off. The report on gun control in Belgium is very topical and timely because the recent terrorist attacks have brought illegal firearms back on the agenda and have placed the spotlight in Belgium in particular. The report "Gun Control in Belgium" does an excellent job of examining the consequences of the 2006 law on trends in gun possession, gun crime and violent deaths. In many ways, the report "Firearms and Violent Deaths in Europe" builds on the report "Gun Control in Belgium" by drawing comparisons with other European countries, especially Austria and Switzerland. It offers an excellent overview of current knowledge about firearms possession, and firearms violence, across Europe, as well as of the "state of the art" on the relationship between the two. The Scientific Council judges comparative perspectives as promising avenues for further research and encourages the researchers to further invest in it.

The research in this cluster also informed presentations and the organisations of events for many different stakeholders such as the government experts, members of parliament, academics and campaigners. The Institute's hosting of the yearly European COARM-NGO meeting in 2015 is particularly worth mentioning.

2. **MANAGING CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE IN SOCIETY**

Because of fluctuations in staff, the research cluster on conflict and violence in society has not matured to the same extent as the one on arms control, possession and use. Research on dealing with urban riots found its way into an advice, but the research focus has subsequently changed somewhat. This is reflected in the report "Dealing with radicalization". To focus on radicalization makes a lot of sense. Within this area, the report does not present original research but rather maps current issues that need to be (or are being) discussed. This is an important and reasonable step with a view to where this research cluster stands. The Scientific Council has suggested a couple of points for future publications such as a more precise question and focus and more precise definitions of key concepts.

3. COMMEMORATION OF THE PAST

This research cluster has focused on the commemoration of World War I and the politics around it. There were no new publications in 2015 to be reviewed. This reflects the fact that this cluster was highly topical just before and during the centenary of the beginning of the war.

In 2015 the prior research work on memory politics was shared in academic seminars and lectures at home and abroad.

4. PEACE AND SECURITY IN FLEMISH FOREIGN POLICY

This research cluster on peace and security in Flemish Foreign Policy has been the most recent one. The report “Vredesopbouw en conflictpreventie in het Vlaamse buitenlandbeleid” is the first publication in this new cluster. The report does a very good job in mapping the peacebuilding policies and activities of key players such as the United Nations and the European Union, in situating Flemish policy in this context and in outlining the background of the initiative of the government to enrich its foreign policy with a structural attention to peace.

Dr. Wolfgang Wagner,
*Chair of the Scientific Council
of the Flemish Peace Institute*



The Flemish Peace Institute in 2015: organization and staff

The Founding Act: the guidelines for the Flemish Peace Institute

In the Founding Act of the Flemish Peace Institute (7 May 2004), the Flemish Parliament set out four tasks for this para-parliamentary institution: conducting fundamental and policy relevant research, collecting information sources and making them available, information and education, and advising the parliament and the government.

Peace research, covering both fundamental scientific research and research that responds to current events, is the primary task of the Flemish Peace Institute. This research is designed to contribute to the promotion of peaceful and equitable solutions to conflicts, and to establishing the conditions for lasting peace.

The Flemish Peace Institute also has the task of informing the Flemish Parliament, civil society and the public about peace and the prevention of violence, and about the results of research it carries out. It is also tasked with creating forums where experts, policy makers, and members of civil society can meet with each other and discuss questions of peace.

Finally, the Flemish Peace Institute formulates general or specific advice, either on its own initiative or at the request of the Flemish Parliament. The Flemish Parliament Act explicitly defines the Institute's advisory function to the Flemish Parliament with regard to the annual report of the Government of Flanders on the arms trade, but Parliament can also call upon the expertise of the Flemish Peace Institute in other matters. The Flemish Peace Institute itself can formulate advice based on its research at any time.

Target audience and mission

The fourfold mission of the Flemish Peace Institute targets a broad audience. As a para-parliamentary institution, the Institute primarily serves the Flemish Parliament, providing support in the execution of its core duties. Among other tasks, the Flemish Peace Institute assists the Flemish Parliament in drawing up decrees, and in the effective monitoring and oversight of executive action flowing from the transfer of powers with regard to the import, export, and transit of arms in 2003.

Through its Board of Directors, the Peace Institute keeps a finger on the pulse of the broader social environment in Flanders – employers, workers, academia, peace movements, and political parties.

THE MISSION OF THE FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE, WHICH HAS ONCE AGAIN BEEN CONSOLIDATED IN A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2015-2019, IS:

In order to work towards building a more peaceful society, both in Flanders and in the rest of the world, we must thoroughly analyse questions about peace and, following an open debate, undertake the necessary steps to achieve our goal. The Flemish Peace Institute provides a guarantee for in-depth analyses, for informing and organizing debates, and for measures for promoting peace and preventing violence by providing policy recommendations.

The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors of the Flemish Peace Institute is composed of 19 members from various sectors of Flemish civil society. The members hold a five-year mandate, and are appointed by the Flemish Parliament. To ensure that the Peace Institute is an independent institute with a broad basis and the required expertise, the Founding Act provided for a balanced representation: six members serving in their own name who have been nominated by the parties in the Flemish Parliament, three members recommended by the Flemish Inter-university Council, three members recommended by a voluntary cooperative partnership of Dutch-language peace organizations, and four members recommended by the Flanders Social and Economic Council. The Board of Directors thus constituted further co-opts three more members. The principle of balanced representation between men and women in advisory and administrative bodies is applied in the composition of the Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors was reconstituted once again for a duration of five years in 2015. Mrs Van Hecke was elected as the new chairperson of the Board, and Mr Dirk Rochtus as the new vice-chair.

The composition of the Board of Directors in 2015 was as follows:

For the political parties:

Raf Burm
Annemie Charlier
Axel Delvoie
Dirk Rochtus (vice-chair)
Reinhilde Van Moer
Diane Verstraeten

For VLIR (Flemish Inter-University Council):

Prof. Berber Bevernage
Prof. Ann Pauwels
Prof. Tom Sauer

For the peace movements:

Philippe Haeyaert
Brigitte Herremans
Pieter Van Eecke

For SERV (Flanders Social and Economic Council):

Jan Boulogne
Patrick Develtere
Els Dirix
Steven Luys

Co-opted:

Bilal Benyaich
Filip Reyniers
Mieke Van Hecke (chair)

The Scientific Council

As scientific research constitutes one of the basic pillars sustaining the activities of the Flemish Peace Institute, the Founding Act provided for a Scientific Council that offers substantive support to the Board of Directors and the Scientific Secretariat in their research activities. As an advisory body of international composition, the Scientific Council evaluates the quality of the Flemish Peace Institute's research and advises the Board of Directors and the Scientific Secretariat on important trends in research regarding peace and security, and, given its expertise, may also be consulted in the course of ongoing research.

The Scientific Council is composed of the Chair of the Board of Directors, eight national and international specialists selected from academic circles and NGOs, and the Director of the Flemish Peace Institute. The Board of Directors appoints the members of the Scientific Council for a term of five years, and the Scientific Council usually meets twice a year.

The Scientific Council was reconstituted with the following members in 2015:

- Doctor Sybille Bauer – Director of the Dual-use and Arms Trade Control Programme of SIPRI.
- Prof. J. Peter Burgess – Professor at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris and Adjunct-Professor at the University of Copenhagen.
- Prof. Huub Dijstelbloem – Professor of Philosophy of Science and Politics at the University of Amsterdam.

- Prof. Brad Evans – Director of the Histories of Violence project and Senior Lecturer at the University of Bristol.
- Prof. Elise Féron – University researcher and lecturer at the University of Tampere (Tampere Peace Research Institute).
- Prof. Keith Krause – Professor at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva.
- Doctor Marcel Maussen – Assistant Professor at the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies of the University of Amsterdam.
- Prof. Antoon Vandevelde – Professor of Philosophy at the Centre for Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy of the University of Leuven.
- Prof. Wolfgang Wagner – Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Sciences of the Vrije Universiteit (Free University) Amsterdam (VU)

The Scientific Secretariat

The Scientific Secretariat is the operational centre of the Flemish Peace Institute. The researchers work in the offices of the House of Flemish Representatives, building up the documentation centre and preparing advisory notes.

The Secretariat was composed of
the following members in 2015:

Director

Tomas Baum

Researchers

Lore Colaert (as of October 2015)

Sara Depauw

Nils Duquet

Jorg Kustermans (until May 2015)

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*“We learn not from the past itself,
but from understanding
how we deal with this past,,*

Tomas Baum,
director

*About the war legacy in a speech to the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie
vir Wetenskap en Kuns (South African Academy for Science and Arts)
in Pretoria in October 2015*

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