

Flanders & the world: connecting through peace

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

flemish
peaceinstitute

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A LOOK BACK AT 2021



NILS DUQUET & JAN PEUMANS

In 2021, the Flemish Peace Institute celebrated its **15th anniversary**. Over the past 15 years, the Peace Institute has grown – despite its small team – into an internationally renowned independent institute for peace research focusing on the arms trade, armed violence, peace and remembrance education, and social polarisation and radicalisation. Its close ties with the **Flemish Parliament** ensure that the Peace Institute can keep its finger on the political pulse, while the multi-party **board of directors** not only sets the strategic direction but also guarantees the independence of the institute.

The day-to-day operations of the Peace Institute are in the hands of the **Scientific Secretariat**. In 2021, this secretariat had ten employees: a director, six researchers, a communications officer and two part-time office managers. The Peace Institute also has an active internship policy through which national and international interns support the work of the researchers and communications officer. Because of the measures taken against Covid-19, in 2021, like so many others, we largely worked from home. However, that did not prevent us from taking many, often new, initiatives to promote peace and prevent violence. As always, in 2021 we were able to count on the President of the Flemish Parliament and the various **parliamentary services** to support our work.

Peace research is and will remain the core task of the Peace Institute but there is also a strong emphasis on formulating policy advice and informing the general public. In line with the Strategic Plan 2020–2024, the research of the Peace Institute is situated in two domains: “Conflict, peace and society” and “Weapons, peace and violence”. To guarantee the quality of our research, our projects always undergo rigorous planning that takes into account objectives, policy relevance, context, and resources. In the final phase, the reports of the Peace Institute undergo at least two scientific reviews. For this purpose, we make use of the knowledge and experience of our **Scientific Council**, which consists of eight experts from Belgium and abroad. You can read their evaluation of our research activities in 2021 further on in this report (see p. 38). Based on thorough research, the Peace Institute formulates recommendations for the Flemish Parliament and other policy-makers. The objective: to steer the legislative and policy framework in a more peaceful direction.

But with our research, advice and information activities, we also want to **inspire and support** citizens building peace and preventing violence in their own communities. In this way, we try to actively contribute to a more peaceful society in Flanders and beyond. Of course, we do not do this alone: the Peace Institute actively cooperates with a **broad range of actors** at home and abroad, including other peace institutes, academic and policy-oriented research organisations, the educational and cultural spheres, civil society and the security services.

Although the Covid-19 measures hampered our work, the Peace Institute was very active in 2021. In the past year, we published no fewer than **12 of our own reports** and other research publications, and we organised fourteen (mainly digital, due to the Covid-19 measures) events to highlight our research and other important developments. We also wrote contributions for several external publications, explained our research and advice in parliamentary committees, and actively participated in events organised by other organisations, ranging from expert meetings and debates to guest lectures and academic conferences. By actively focusing on press releases and personal contacts with journalists, we additionally received more than twice as much media coverage

compared to the previous year. Our visibility online and on social media also increased significantly. In line with our strategic communication plan, these elements help to put our research and advice in the spotlight in the **public debate**.

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Conflict, peace and society

In the research domain “Conflict, peace and society”, a crucial element is research into peace education, peaceful coexistence, conflict management and the prevention of violence in Flemish society. From various angles, we study how peaceful coexistence and a constructive approach to conflicts can take shape – from the school and the neighbourhood to the wider public sphere.

A key publication was our research report on the scientific literature on polarisation.

In 2021, we published our research results on the various non-violent ways of **coping with opposition and tension**. A key publication was our research report on the scientific literature on polarisation, but there was also a chapter on multi-voicedness in museum work in a book by FARO (the Flemish Institution for Cultural Heritage). And, together with Mediawijs, Tumult and the Hannah Arendt Institute, we produced an EDUbox (a box with educational content) with VRT (the Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting Organization) on “us and them thinking”. At the end of 2021, we also organised a roundtable discussion on polarisation in the Flemish Parliament with prevention officials from local authorities, researchers and policy-makers. Furthermore, we gave guest lectures on polarisation in the Peace Education Department of the University of Antwerp, the Universitair Centrum Sint-Ignatius Antwerpen (UCSIA) and the Antwerp Peace Centre.

We were also very active in 2021 regarding **radicalisation**. Based on our evaluation of the Flemish Action Plan against violent radicalisation and polarisation, we organised several well-attended webinars about the role of youth (welfare) work, local integrated security cells (i.e. multi-agency platforms at a municipal level) and education. We also discussed the prevention of lone actor radicalisation and the European anti-terrorism policy. Additionally, we organised a panel discussion on the local approach to radicalisation at the Hannah Arendt Institute’s Facts to Act festival. Separately, we ensured that our research on radicalisation received an international response. Two analytical papers on terrorism, written for the Radicalisation Awareness Network of the European Union, and a chapter for the handbook on terrorism prevention of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), were instrumental in putting this research on the international map.

A third pillar of our research into peaceful coexistence and conflict management is **peace and remembrance education**. Because of the Covid-19 measures, our traditional 11 November Lecture in cooperation with Ypres (known as the “city of peace”) and the In Flanders Fields Museum could not take place in 2020. Fortunately, however, it did go ahead in 2021: Koen Aerts, historian at Ghent University and the Study and Documentation Centre on War and Contemporary Society (Cegesoma), took us on a fas-

cinating voyage of discovery with the woodwind quintet Bois de Vivre, taking in historic images, art and music that inspire us to give our democracy a peaceful direction in all its polyphony. Furthermore, we gave a lecture on the challenges of peace education and remembrance education at the opening of the exhibition “Over de muur” (On the Berlin Wall) at the Antwerp Peace Centre and a lecture on learning from a violent past at the close of the international conference of the RETHINK network of museums and educational organisations.

Weapons, peace and violence

The Peace Institute was also very active in the research field “Weapons, peace and violence” in 2021. Topics included controls on the export of conventional military goods and dual-use goods, firearms, and controls on and disarmament of nuclear weapons.

In 2020, the research on **arms export control** led, among other things, to an analysis of the Flemish foreign arms trade. True to tradition, the Peace Institute also published the Dutch-language summary of the Yearbook of the authoritative Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Furthermore, the Peace Institute analysed – at the request of the Foreign Policy, European Affairs, International Cooperation and Tourism Committee of the Flemish Parliament – the transit of military goods through Flanders. This study contains an in-depth comparative analysis of the transit control systems in seven European countries, identifies challenges in this area, and outlines how international cooperation and information can bring about better and more efficient transit

Two analysis papers on terrorism were instrumental in putting our research on the international map.

control systems. In our advice connected to the annual report of the Flemish government on the foreign arms trade, we put forward several concrete ways to optimise the control system for the transit of military equipment. In 2022, the Peace Institute will present the findings of this research and provide advice at various international forums.

Another important element in the control of the Flemish foreign arms trade is the control of the end use of exported military goods and technologies. This issue has regularly been discussed in the Flemish Parliament in recent years. To support the parliamentary debate on this issue, we analysed the European and Flemish legal framework for end-use control. This resulted in an analysis note in 2021. Furthermore, it formed the starting point of a new research project that, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Arms Trade Decree in 2022, will provide a thorough analysis of the current defence-related industry in Flanders and of possible improvements and challenges for the control system.

The Peace Institute was also very active in the area of **firearms control**. In 2021, on the fifteenth anniversary of the Weapons Act, we organised a webinar and published an analytical paper on the possession of firearms and the challenges for the control system. In the same year, the Peace Institute also coordinated Project TARGET, a large-scale European research endeavour on firearms violence and illicit firearms trafficking in Europe that was funded by the European Commission. This resulted in the publication of an English research report in December 2021. With a series of webinars, the publication of an edited volume of country-specific studies (including on Belgium) and a Dutch research report on firearm violence in Belgium, the dissemination of the research results of Project TARGET will continue in 2022.

In our advice connected to the annual report of the Flemish government on the foreign arms trade, we put forward several concrete ways to optimise the control system for the transit of military equipment in Belgium.

In 2021 we also received the good news that the European Commission would fund a follow-up to previous work by the Peace Institute on firearms violence: Project INSIGHT. Here, the Peace Institute – together with its partners Textgain, the Small Arms Survey, SIPRI and Leiden University – will conduct research into various aspects of firearms violence and develop an online monitor for firearms violence in Europe.

Furthermore, in 2021 the Peace Institute published two reports on the diversion of firearms from legal to illegal spheres in Europe (Project DIVERT) and we organised several international webinars on this theme. We also analysed the grenade-related incidents that occurred in Belgium in 2021 and wrote a chapter on arms trafficking for a book on the relationship between terrorism and organised crime that was published in the spring of 2022.

Not only did we organise our own events on the control of the legal and illegal arms trades and arms violence but we also presented our research at academic conferences and at events organised by various national and international partners – such as KU Leuven, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL).

In line with the Strategic Plan 2020–2024, the Peace Institute also analysed the control and disarmament of **weapons of mass destruction** in 2021.

For example, in 2021 we examined the various options for Belgium and Flanders to contribute to initiatives for nuclear disarmament. On the basis of this research report, the



The Peace Institute also analysed the control and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction in 2021. For example, we examined the various options for Belgium and Flanders to contribute to initiatives for nuclear disarmament.

Peace Institute forwarded various concrete initiatives that would enable Belgium to contribute to nuclear disarmament in the short term and the longer term. We brought this advice and report to the attention of the press and policy-makers at a panel discussion of the Egmont Institute during its annual conference on foreign policy.

In 2021 the Peace Institute also highlighted the issue of the proliferation and use of chemical weapons. On the International Day of Peace we organised a screening of the moving

documentary *The Cave* in cooperation with the King Baudouin Foundation and the DOCVILLE film festival. We closed the day with a productive panel discussion on the role that the international community in general and Flanders in particular can play in countering the use of chemical weapons.

Furthermore, the Peace Institute investigated the chemical and biological dual-use sector in Flanders and the control system aimed at preventing the potential misuse of chemical and biological dual-use goods and technologies. The accompanying research report and advice were published in February 2022 and presented during a panel discussion in the Flemish Parliament with representatives of the Flemish Strategic Goods Control Unit, Belgian customs authorities, and representatives from industry and a Flemish university.

Strengthening peace networks and supporting a peace-oriented foreign policy

In 2021, the Peace Institute took the first concrete steps to further develop its platform function on peace issues. In this endeavour, we want to constructively build upon the broader social debate on peace issues and situate current problems concerning international relations and societal conflicts within a broader framework of conflict prevention, conflict management and peacebuilding. In doing so, we want to capitalise on symbolic peace moments such as the International Day of Peace and the nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize.

In early 2021, after a public appeal via our newsletter and social media, we nominated the protesters in Belarus for the Nobel Peace Prize. A few months later, we organised a webinar on the situation in the country and on non-violent resistance with speakers from VRT, Amnesty International and Pax Christi, among others.

In 2021, we started preparing a new line of research in which we are analysing what the possibilities and limits are for Flanders to engage in a meaningful peace-oriented foreign policy.

In this way, we aimed to inspire educational professionals and provide them with ideas on how to incorporate peace into the curriculum in schools. At the end of 2021, a new nomination process was started in which students were actively involved. This led to COVAX being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in early 2022.

In order to contribute even more powerfully to the international and national public debate, the Peace Institute wants to play a leading role in strengthening the network of peace institutes in Europe. In 2021, for example, we actively participated in a panel discussion on the meaning and the role of peace institutes during a digital event of the Academi Heddwch Cymru, the regional peace academy of Wales, whose recent founding was partly inspired by the Peace Institute. In 2022, we will continue this work and organise an international conference on peace research in Europe.

Moreover, in 2021, we started preparing a new line of research in which we are analysing what the possibilities and limits are for Flanders to engage in a meaningful peace-oriented foreign policy. In 2022, we will investigate how other regions and small states are using their foreign policy and diplomatic instruments to promote peace. Subsequently, we want to discuss the results of this analysis with Flemish Members of Parliament, policy-makers, academics and civil society organisations in order to arrive at concrete recommendations for Flemish foreign policy.

This focus on a peace-oriented Flemish foreign policy will be a spearhead of our work in 2022. This is apparent in this annual report, which is more than a detailed retrospective review. In their contributions to this annual report, the researchers of the Peace Institute explicitly make the link between their research activities and Flemish foreign policy. In this way, we want to draw attention to how Flanders – through research, education, inspiration and international cooperation – is connected to the rest of the world through peace.

We wish you much reading pleasure and inspiration!

PEACE INSTITUTE 2021 IN FIGURES

12

Publications about our research

2

Recommendations based on our research

10

Webinars of our own for which 1,016 people registered

3

Physical events of our own for which 212 people registered

19

Content contributions to external information activities

67

Media mentions with 7 on television or radio

10

Newsletters published online

200,088

Views on social media



A meeting of peace institutes: Sibylle Bauer and Nils Duquet in conversation

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Sibylle Bauer, director of studies on armament and disarmament at the world-renowned Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), is wary of drawing any major conclusions from the war in Ukraine at this stage. But she is upset and disappointed. Suddenly, the world seems very far from the promise of peace that the era after the fall of the Berlin Wall seemed to herald.

However, with her work on the control of arms exports, she has been trying to fulfil that promise throughout her career. She came into contact with the Flemish Peace Institute many years ago as a guest researcher. Today, she sits on its Scientific Council. In these turbulent times, she and director Nils Duquet talk about peace in Europe and the role of peace institutes in it.

Nils: Your research, Sibylle, was probably the first report on arms control that I ever read. *(laughs)* But don't underestimate the impact. The focus on transparency and democratic accountability that we found in it helped us tremendously, in our early years as a peace institute, to make our research relevant to the Flemish Parliament and policy-makers.

Sibylle: One thing is certain: the Flemish Peace Institute and SIPRI speak the same language. We both focus on solid research based on facts and figures. Through a thorough process of writing, revising and scientifically testing, we try to come to a representation of the research results that is as objective as possible. The bar is set very high. It has to be, if you want to behave responsibly as a research institute...

Nils: I notice that in times of fake news, the demand for thorough research increases. Evolutions follow each other faster and faster. This makes it important to listen carefully to what is going on with policy-makers, in the Flemish Parliament, for example. But input from fellow researchers is also important to help you choose your research focus. This research network is also crucial in enabling us to respond quickly to current events, even if they exceed the planned research agenda.

Sibylle: At SIPRI we no longer work like we did when we started in 1966; we still have a built-in review process and we also still produce our Yearbook (an extensive summary of which is translated every year by the Peace Institute, ed.). But we also work on shorter online formats and are available for interviews. Content-wise, too, much has changed. Initially, the focus was mainly on armaments. In the 1980 and 1990s, we added an important section on conflict management. Over the past ten years, much attention has also been paid to the prevention of violence, and we have highlighted the links between, for instance, peace and development, climate or gender issues.



Nils: For us, too, this focus on prevention and positive peace has become increasingly important. It helps that the more preventive aspects of our policy are within the remit of the Flemish regional government. Policy decisions concerning education,

culture, youth, housing, etc. can make important contributions to long-term solutions for peace in Europe. In 2022, we are going to work on this even more, not only by studying how these solutions can be linked to a peaceful Flemish foreign policy, but also by examining how we can put our research – for instance, on peace and remembrance education – even more on the map internationally.

Sibylle: In that respect, Flanders' war history is an asset; the legacy of the First World War and the first poison gas attacks give the Flemish region an important symbolic value but also a historical responsibility. Additionally, the European Union could do more in that respect – for instance, by demonstrating to other regions that intense international cooperation is not a merely theoretical exercise but helps to overcome major divisions. Many countries say, "Here the situation is different, our differences are too great." Well, let them visit Ypres. There too the gap between the warring parties seemed unbridgeable. Now France and Germany are working closely together for peace in Europe. That is the core of the EU project and it is more important today than ever.

Nils: This focus on peace is sometimes portrayed as a naive objective. Yet the quest for peace is universal and realistic. Peace research teaches us that we do not have to fall into the same trap time and time again. Both SIPRI and the Flemish Peace Institute provide new insights in this field. In order to broaden and deepen these insights, the Flemish Peace Institute wants to continue to strengthen the ties between the various European peace institutes in the years to come. For, although each institute has its own specific focus, there are still many opportunities for European cooperation, in the areas of both

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joint research and communication. We want to contribute to this in 2022 by organising, among other things, a conference with peace institutes on European peace research.

Sibylle: Setting up an international network is an enormous task. But it is worth the effort.

Through the EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Consortium, which SIPRI coordinates and its associated Network of over 100 research centres, of which the FPI is a member, we have succeeded in bringing together a great deal of expertise on non-proliferation from almost every European country. Now we are trying to expand to research institutes in other parts of the world, even if they are non-EU countries, and to a new generation of researchers and policy-makers. We are also looking to connect with other disciplines – natural scientists, for example. Only they really know what, for example, quantum technology means. Furthermore, for SIPRI the nature and future of warfare, and how citizens can be protected by



international law in the future, also are relevant topics today.

Nils: New technologies are also a focus for the Flemish Peace Institute. These bring dangers but also opportunities. With our INSIGHT project, in cooperation with SIPRI, we are currently setting up a European monitor for gun violence. Artificial intelligence will be a component of that monitor. And blockchain technology could well revolutionise export controls. All these topics offer us a glimpse of the future, and this in turn will enable us to increase our impact with policy-makers.

Sibylle: At SIPRI we also make an impact in our contacts with policy-

makers. By making summaries of our research available in even more languages, we want to increase that impact worldwide. This was perhaps the only positive aspect of the COVID19 pandemic: because we continued to work online, a number of our events and research results became more accessible. This increased our impact significantly.

Nils: True, at the Flemish Peace Institute we also made many new contacts online with our webinars last year. But we should not underestimate the importance of physical

contact, if only to be able to work more intensively with international guest researchers and trainees again. The ties that are thus forged often prove very useful and future-proof. No better proof of that than this double interview. *(laughs)*

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INFORMATION ACTIVITIES 2021

PRESENTATIONS IN THE FLEMISH PARLIAMENT

11 March 2021

Presentation in the Committee for Education of the Flemish Parliament on the role of education in the prevention of radicalisation

20 April 2021

Presentation in the Committee for Foreign Policy of the Flemish Parliament on the 2020 annual report of the Flemish Peace Institute

16 November 2021

Presentation in the Committee for Foreign Policy of the Flemish Parliament on arms transit, arms trade and end use

OUR OWN WEBINARS

22 February 2021

The LISC-Rs, radicalisation and polarisation

Panel: Daphne Costes (Flemish Agency for Home Affairs), Maarten De Waele (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities – VVSG), Johan Put (Catholic University of Leuven), Jolien Timmermans (Welfare Department), and Nils Duquet & Annelies Pauwels (Flemish Peace Institute)

12 March 2021

The role of the education sector in the prevention of violent radicalisation and polarisation

Panel: Lieven Boeve (Catholic Education Flanders), Kevin Goris (Kruit VZW), Els Jammaers (Arktos VZW), Emilie Le Roi (Department of Education and Training) and Raymonda Verdyck (GO!)

15 March 2021

P/CVE projects: How to measure and know what works?

Panel: Daphne Costes (Flemish Agency for Home Affairs) Wim Hardyns (Ghent University), Eef Cornelissen (Democratic Dialogue), Safa Göregen (Free University of Brussels) and Jörg Gebhard (VVSG)

22 March 2021

Five years after the Brussels attacks: An evaluation of the preventive measures and the new EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda

Panel: Sylvia Bottarin (Prevention of Radicalisation Unit, DG Home Affairs), Letizia Paoli (Leuven Institute for Criminology), Daniel Koehler (Competence Centre Against Extremism – Konex – of the Ministry of the Interior, Digitisation and Migration, Baden-Württemberg), and Nils Duquet & Annelies Pauwels (Flemish Peace Institute)

30 March 2021

Youth (welfare) work and the prevention of violent radicalisation

Panel: Els Van Effelterre (JES), Janne Vermeesch (Department of Culture, Youth and Media), and Nils Duquet & Diederik Cops (Flemish Peace Institute)

28 April 2021

Project DIVERT: Forgotten weapons? Non-regularised firearms in the European Union

Panel: Paul James (Arquebus Solutions), Adriana Toston Diez (EMPACT Firearms), Maria Jimenez Victorio (Spanish National Firearms Focal Point), and Nils Duquet & Matteo Dressler (Flemish Peace Institute)



10 May 2021

Lone actor radicalising

Panel: Gert Vercauteren (Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis – CUTA), Sertan Icten (Wetteren local police), Gert Vanherk (Prison of Hasselt, Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family), and Nils Duquet & Annelies Pauwels (Flemish Peace Institute)



19 May 2021

Teachers, educational professionals and non-violent protest

Panel: Jan Balliauw (VRT), Wies Degraeve (Amnesty International) and Annemarie Gielen (Pax Christi)



26 May 2021

Project DIVERT – Firearms theft in the EU

Panel: Frédéric Quewet (Belgian Federal Police), Ian Head (National Ballistics Intelligence Service – NABIS), Alain Lapon (SEESAC), and Nils Duquet & Quitterie de Labbey (Flemish Peace Institute)



08 June 2021

15 years of the Arms Act

Panel: Emmy Vanhees (Provincial Arms Service Limburg), Mary-Ann De Beuckelaer (Federal Arms Service), Christophe Dhondt (Police Zone Vlas), Vincent Van Quickenborne (Minister of Justice), and Nils Duquet & Diederik Cops (Flemish Peace Institute)



23 June 2021

Project DIVERT: Firearms fraud in the European Union

Panel: Giovanna Maletta (SIPRI), Martin van der Meij (Europol), Audrius Ciupala (License Division of the Public Police Board, Lithuania) and Nils Duquet (Flemish Peace Institute)



13 December 2021

Project TARGET: Online presentation of results

Panel: Marieke Liem (Leiden University), Richard Martens (Dutch Police), Febe Liagre (European Commission), and Nils Duquet & Dennis Vanden Auweele (Flemish Peace Institute)

OUR OWN PHYSICAL EVENTS



21 September 2021

Chemical weapons: Documentary screening of *The Cave* and interview on the occasion of the Day of Peace, in cooperation with the Koning Boudewijnstichting and the DOCVILLE film festival

Panel: Filip De Craemer and Nils Duquet. Moderator: Inge Vrancken



25 October 2021

Roundtable discussion on polarisation in cooperation with the Wij-Zij network

Panel: Baldwin Van Gorp (Institute for Media Studies, KU Leuven), Ron Van Wonderen (KIS/ Knowledge Platform Integration & Society) and Maarten Van Alstein (Flemish Peace Institute)



10 November 2021

11 November Lecture by historian Koen Aerts, with woodwind quintet Bois de Vivre, in cooperation with the City of Ypres and the In Flanders Fields Museum

EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS

28 January 2021

Lecture on Belgian firearms in international conflicts in cooperation with UPV Wetenschapspopularisering (with Nils Duquet)

2-4 maart 2021

Lecture: “Learning from the violent past: from theory to practice”, at the final conference of the RETHINK network (with Maarten Van Alstein)

07 April 2021

ICCT live briefing on the link between small arms and light weapons and terrorist financing (with Nils Duquet)

14 April 2021

Regional meeting of small arms and light weapons (SALW) commissions organised by SEESAC (with Nils Duquet)

05 May 2021

Lecture: “Polarisation, conflict and peace”, at the Peace Education Training Programme, a cooperation between Antwerp Universities UA, UCSIA and Vredescentrum (with Maarten Van Alstein)

11 May 2021

ICCT live briefing: “Weapons use by ‘lone actor’ terrorists in Western Europe” (with Annelies Pauwels)

15-16 June 2021

Stockholm Criminology Symposium 2021 (with Diederik Cops, Quitterie de Labbey and Nils Duquet)

05 July 2021

Panel discussion: “A peace institute: Meaning and role”, organised by Academi Heddwch Cymru (Peace Academy of Wales) (with Nils Duquet)

10 September 2021

Project TARGET panel on the link between illicit firearms trafficking and gun violence at the annual Eurocrim conference (with Quitterie de Labbey, Nils Duquet and Dennis Vanden Auweele)

21 September 2021

UNODC course: Diversion of firearms from legal to illegal (with Nils Duquet)

23 September 2021

CEPOL course: Firearms: Legal, strategic and operational aspects (with Nils Duquet)

23 September 2021

Lecture: “Diversity Day: Dealing with controversy and polarisation in the classroom” (with Maarten Van Alstein)

08 October 2021

Lecture: “Hand grenades in Belgium”, at an expert meeting at Leiden University (with Nils Duquet)



15 October 2021

Lecture: “Afghanistan: 20 years after 9/11 – the withdrawal from Afghanistan and radicalisation of European forces” at the Jean Monnet Network on EU Counter-terrorism (EUCTER) (with Annelies Pauwels)



28 October 2021

Workshop of Ghent University and Strong Cities Network: Violent extremism and polarisation (with Annelies Pauwels)



29 October 2021

Panel discussion: “How future-proof is our local approach to radicalisation?” at the Facts to Act festival (Hannah Arendt Institute) (with Nils Duquet and Annelies Pauwels)



09 November 2021

Lecture at the Vredescentrum Antwerpen (Peace Centre Antwerp) at the occasion of the official opening of the exhibition “Over de Muur” (with Maarten Van Alstein)



19 November 2021

Panel discussion: “NPT@50: Between non-proliferation and disarmament” at the Annual Conference on Belgian Foreign Policy of the Egmont Institute (with Nils Duquet)



23 November 2021

Lecture at KU Leuven: “Arms trade”
(met Nils Duquet)



15 December 2021

Webinar: “Dealing with controversy and polarisation in the classroom” at the Hannah Arendt Institute (with Maarten Van Alstein)

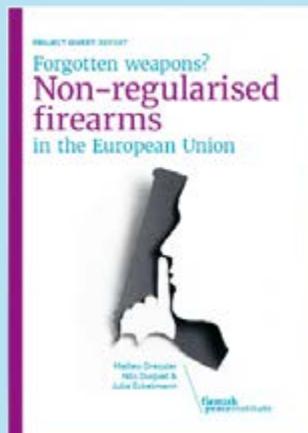
PUBLICATIONS AND ADVICE OF THE FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE IN 2021

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20 April 2021

Annual report 2020: Tirelessly building

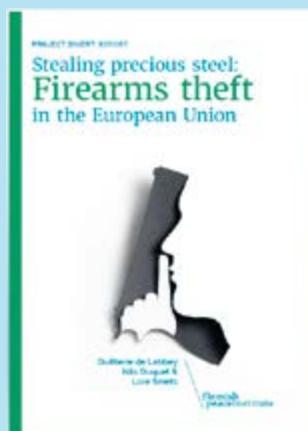


The European Project DIVERT focuses on the illegal diversion of weapons in Europe. The Flemish Peace Institute coordinated the project and wrote two reports in 2021 focusing successively on non-regularisation and on theft of weapons.

28 April 2021

Report of Project DIVERT: Non-regularised firearms in the European Union

Matteo Dressler, Nils Duquet and Julie Eckelmann



26 May 2021

Report of Project DIVERT: Firearms theft in the European Union

Quitterie de Labbey, Nils Duquet and Lore Smets



08 June 2021

Analysis: Vuurwapenbezit in Vlaanderen: motieven en uitdagingen voor het controlesysteem

(Firearms possession in Flanders: motives and challenges for the control system) Diederik Cops

Fifteen years after the Belgian Arms Act was signed – in the wake of Hans Van Themsche’s deadly raid in Antwerp – this analysis shows not only the positive impact of the Arms Act but also how important it is to keep updating the rules and control mechanisms.

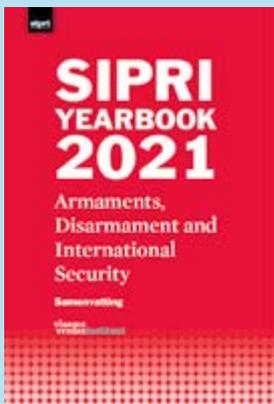


14 July 2021

Report: Polarisatie, conflict en vrede (Polarisation, conflict and peace)

Maarten Van Alstein

Grounded in the scientific literature, this report by the Flemish Peace Institute develops an original conceptual framework that can offer support to those who – professionally or as interested citizens – are interested in polarisation in Flanders.



29 September 2021

SIPRI Yearbook 2021: Summary in Dutch

In 2021 the Flemish Peace Institute also published the official Dutch-language summary of the well-known Yearbook of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a leading and independent source of data and analyses on armament, disarmament and international security.



29 October 2021

Analysis: Vlaamse buitenlandse wapenhandel in 2020 (The Flemish foreign arms trade in 2020)

Diederik Cops

This report provides an overview of the most important trends in the trade in military equipment from, to and through Flanders in 2020. Some of its notable findings are:

- The licensed arms trade from Flanders amounted to €42.2 million, significantly less compared to previous years.
- With only three licences issued, licensed transit through Flanders continues to decline.

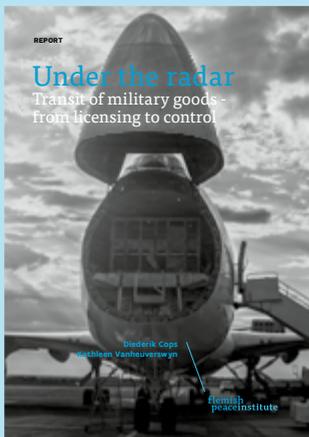


29 October 2021

Analysis: Eindgebruik van defensiegerelateerde goederen – Vlaams en Europees juridisch en administratief controlekader
(End-use controls of defence-related goods – The current Flemish and European legal and administrative framework)

Diederik Cops

This report discusses the European framework, the way in which the Flemish government organises the control of end use within the Flemish legal system and the way in which the relevant European provisions are implemented in Flanders.



15 November 2021

Report: Under the radar – Transit of military goods: from licensing to control

Diederik Cops, Kathleen Vanheuverwijn

Transit is the transport of military goods – with or without transshipment – across a territory. For some years now, there has been a considerable decrease in the number of issued and denied licences for the transit of military goods through Flanders. At the request of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Flemish Parliament, the Flemish Peace Institute conducted a study with a view to identifying possible explanations for this decline.



15 November 2021

Advice: Vlaamse buitenlandse wapenhandel 2021
(The Flemish foreign arms trade in 2021)

Based on the aforementioned study on the control of the transit of military goods, the Flemish Peace Institute advises the following measures:

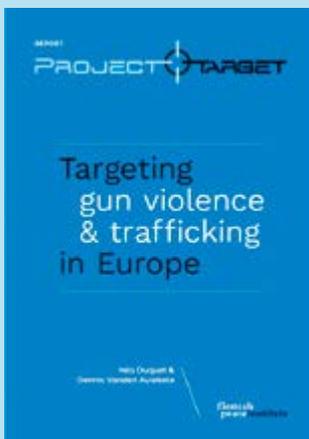
- reduce the complexity of transit controls and increase transparency;
- improve communication and information exchange between all stakeholders involved;
- raise awareness among private logistics actors;
- strengthen knowledge and expertise;
- evolve from a licensing system to a comprehensive control system.



19 November 2021

Advice: Advies inzake nucleaire ontwapening en de opties voor België en Vlaanderen hiertoe (Advice on nuclear disarmament and the options for Belgium and Flanders in this respect)

Based on the report *International nuclear disarmament and policy options for Belgium and Flanders* (see below), the Flemish Peace Institute recommends that Belgium and Flanders should play more active roles as bridge-builders. In time, a new policy must lead to the signing of the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons and – in consultation with the United States – to the removal of nuclear weapons from Belgian territory.



13 December 2021

Report of Project TARGET: Targeting gun violence and trafficking in Europe

Nils Duquet and Dennis Vanden Auweele
An arms race among drug criminals and the increased availability of illegal firearms could lead to more criminal and even terrorist violence. This is evident from the report of Project TARGET, an extensive new European study coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute.



21 December 2021

Report: International nuclear disarmament and policy options for Belgium and Flanders

Lode Dewaegheneire, Veronica Vella and Sylvain Palle-Calvo
This report, commissioned by the Flemish Peace Institute, examines the various future scenarios and policy options relating to nuclear disarmament for the Belgian and Flemish governments.

EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OUR RESEARCHERS IN 2021

Our researchers do not limit themselves to internal publications to spread their insights.

Maarten Van Alstein contributed to the publication *Het agonistische museum* (The agonistic museum) by FARO (the Flemish Institution for Cultural Heritage) and to the development of an EDUbox that provides teachers with tools to help them work with polarising themes.

February 2021

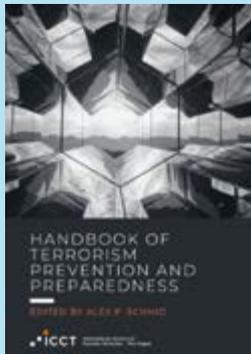


April 2021



With a chapter on the use of weapons by lone actor terrorists in Western Europe, **Annelies Pauwels** made an important contribution to the authoritative *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness* of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT). For the European Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), she described in a first report what right-wing extremism looks like in Europe today. In a second report, she provided more insight into the phenomenon of lone actor terrorism.

May 2021



May 2021



September 2021



THE INTERNATIONAL ROUTE: THE ARMS TRADE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION



Researcher Diederik Cops and director Nils Duquet explain the research on the arms transit, trade and end use in the Foreign Policy Committee of the Flemish Parliament.

**TEXT: DIEDERIK COPS &
DENNIS VANDEN AUWEELE**

Researchers at the Flemish Peace Institute

A peaceful foreign policy is impossible without controlling arms exports and combating uncontrolled and destabilising arms proliferation. International cooperation is an important cornerstone here, both in terms of controlling the foreign trade in conventional weapons and in terms of preventing and tracing illegal arms trafficking. In both areas, the Flemish Peace Institute deliberately opts for international cooperation – not only as part of the solution but also in the research phase and in the dissemination of research results.

International cooperation to secure the international legal trade in arms

Securing the legal international trade in conventional weapons is a necessary step to prevent the illegal diversion of weapons.

All actors in the international production and trade chain bear a share of the responsibility. Only together can they guarantee that a transaction will meet its multitude of legal obligations.

At so-called transit hubs – places where weapons are transferred from their country of origin to their country of destination and where they may be transhipped from one means of transport to another – there is a risk that weapons will be diverted from their intended routes to undesirable destinations and end users. Efficient and effective controls on transit transactions are crucial in preventing this and securing the international arms trade.

International cooperation and information exchange are pivotal in this respect, both for the exporting countries to guarantee the safe transport of the exported goods, and for the transit countries to prevent weapons being diverted via their territory from their intended and approved route and ending up in conflict areas or on the illegal market. This is clearly illustrated by the research conducted by the Peace Institute in 2021 on the request of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Flemish Parliament into the issue of the control of the transit of military goods.

Current trade flows are very fast and largely handled online, both by logistical service providers and by customs authorities. The effectiveness of customs risk management systems and internal control programmes of (international) logistical service providers largely depends on the quality of the information provided. Vague and limited information about the nature of the goods and the transaction make it difficult to deliver efficient and effective control. Although the necessary information will be available somewhere in the transport chain, lack of cooperation and limited awareness commonly hinder its smooth flow between the various actors involved in organising and controlling the transport chain and thereby inhibit proper and swift controls.

All actors in the international production and trade chain bear a share of the responsibility. Only together can they guarantee that a transaction will meet its multitude of legal obligations. Cooperation and information exchange between all these different agencies and actors is important in organising the control of the transit of military goods efficiently, effectively and transparently. Exporting companies should share specific information about their goods with other logistics partners in the transport chain so that those partners can report the strategic character of the goods in all customs declarations in the countries of transit. But the involved governments also have an important responsibility: exporting countries should share with transit countries detailed information about each transaction and the nature of the goods. For this reason, several international instruments, including the UN Arms Trade Treaty, the UN Firearms Protocol, the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), emphasise the importance of, and even the need for, good information exchange between all parties and governments.

New technologies and software already make it technically possible to efficiently monitor goods flows. They also allow logistical service providers and government agencies in the exporting, transit and importing countries to exchange relevant information in advance. However, although these technical possibilities exist, the political commitment to effectively implement measures to share information between agencies and actors in different countries remains limited. The strong national-oriented approach of export control systems contributes to this. Moreover, the difficulty is reinforced by geopolitical considerations and the resistance of governments that sell and buy military goods to sharing information on arms transfers with other countries. More political will is therefore needed to share the necessary information between different countries in order to achieve more efficient, effective and transparent transit controls.

International cooperation to tackle illicit arms trafficking

Controls on the sale and transit of weapons may fail. Therefore, there must be safety nets. The vast majority of firearms in the European Union are legally manufactured, yet some end up illegally. What can be done to counter this drift? International cooperation is crucial. This shows itself in three important areas, namely the legislative framework, operational capacity to enforce the legislation, and knowledge about the problems relating to the illegal arms trade.

Sound international legislation is the first component in combating the illegal arms trade. The European Union is not an island, and its internal borders are open to the free movement of goods and persons. This means that the legislative framework in one member state has an impact on the other member states. If one country has a lax legislative framework for the purchase of firearms (as Belgium did until 2006), individuals

with malicious intentions from other countries can purchase their firearms there for use in their country of origin. When they cross the land border without the proper permits, they are guilty of smuggling and illegal trafficking.

In order to counter this situation and harmonise the various national firearms legislations, the EU issued the Firearms Directive in 1991. However, this was not a miraculous solution as the directive was

not applied in an unambiguous and conclusive manner in all member states. Criminals and terrorists abused these grey zones. For example, until recently, the directive had no uniform standards for the deactivation of firearms (which could consequently be sold “deactivated” but easily be reactivated). Even today, there are still differences in the legislation that allow firearms to fall into the wrong hands.

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Good firearms legislation is an important instrument in the fight against the illegal firearms trade, but it must be enforced. Adequate operational capacity – the second key area – in the relevant services is therefore very important. Compared to other regions worldwide, the EU has low rates of fatal firearm violence. As a result, the urgency to combat illegal firearms often seems low. But the danger of firearms ending up in the wrong hands increases when operational capacity is reduced. There is also the risk of sudden outbursts of gun violence, as we have seen in the Netherlands and Sweden. The weapons used for this purpose often come from outside of the EU – illegal trade in firearms is usually a cross-border phenomenon. This means that international cooperation between the various operational services is also necessary.

Good understanding of the problem of the illegal trade in firearms and firearm violence is the third important element in the fight against these phenomena. The Firearms Directive requires member states to have a registration system for legally held firearms as well as for found, lost and seized firearms. When this information is readily available, it is possible to take quick and decisive action – both nationally and internationally – against firearms that are used in violent activities or cause otherwise problematic situations. Yet there are also major challenges here. Not all national firearms registers are of high quality, and the international exchange of information could often be improved. Nevertheless, there are examples of effective information cooperation. When weapons from the former Yugoslavia were confiscated from Belgian and Dutch criminals in the early 2010s, they were registered thoroughly. The resulting international information exchange in this area provided insights into the smuggling routes used and thus helped to prevent firearms violence.

The Flemish Peace Institute as an active actor in strengthening international cooperation

Cooperation and international coordination are also very important in the research of the Peace Institute. This is reflected, first of all, in the deliberate choice to incorporate the views, perspectives and expertise of various actors and organisations – national and international – in our studies. In the previously mentioned study on transit controls on military items, we actively involved and interviewed licensing and customs authorities from seven other European countries, various international organisations, international logistical service providers and representatives of civil society. In our investigations into illegal firearms trafficking and gun violence, we cooperate with Europol and various national police forces, and also with international organisations such as the UN Office on Drugs and Organised Crime (UNODC).

Secondly, the strengthening of international cooperation and the identification of concrete points of contact are important focuses in most of the Peace Institute's studies. Flanders, just like Europe, is not an island and does not function in an economic, politi-



The Peace Institute is strongly committed to the proactive international dissemination of its conclusions and recommendations to relevant actors. This helps to put Flanders and the Flemish Parliament on the international map.

cal or social vacuum. As such, solutions to certain challenges require international cooperation. They cannot be tackled or solved solely within, by or from Flanders.

Finally, the Peace Institute is strongly committed to the proactive international dissemination of its conclusions and recommendations to relevant actors. This helps to put Flanders and the Flemish Parliament on the international map. Moreover, it allows us, on the one hand, to help translate relevant insights and good practices from other countries into the Flemish context

and, on the other hand, to disseminate interesting Flemish practices in the international arena. In this way, the Peace Institute tries to contribute to a peace-oriented Flemish foreign policy through its research into the international legal and illegal arms trades.

THE EDUCATION ROUTE: WORKING ON PEACE EDUCATION – FROM A FLEMISH CLASS TO THE WORLD AND BACK



Fifth-year pupils at the vocational education school Atlas College in Genk decide in the Flemish Parliament on the Nobel Prize nomination of the Flemish Peace Institute.

TEXT: MAARTEN VAN ALSTEIN

Researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute

In our society, controversial topics such as Covid-19, migration and the climate are hotly debated. Conversations on these topics often do not take the form of empathetic and reasoned dialogue. Sometimes they end in acrimony and polarisation. Tensions and conflicts are also the order of the day internationally. Armed conflicts rage in many countries and civil wars, crime and social chaos take a violent toll. Tensions regularly arise in relations between the major powers. Analyses of the current state of affairs in the world mainly seem to confirm the views of pessimists. But those who look with an open mind also see things other than tensions and violence. All over the world, people and organisations – even in very difficult circumstances – are undaunted in their commitment to non-violence and democracy. And countless people strive for peaceful coexistence with others, not only by engaging with society but also in their daily lives, in their families and at work.

It is not self-evident to attribute all these conflicts and tensions to the same cause. Each context – from the interpersonal to the interstate – has its own characteristics and complexities. Yet these conflicts raise questions that are relevant to all these contexts, however varied the answers may be. How can we work for non-violence and peace, both in the small encounters of everyday life and in society at large? How can we handle tensions and conflicts in such a way that they do not result in violence?

These questions were the starting point of our widely read and discussed report *Polarisation, conflict and peace*, which we published in 2021. In that report, we explored how policy-makers and practitioners can deal constructively with conflict and polarisation. The challenge is to prevent tensions and antagonisms from becoming harmful or violent, while leaving the space for multiple voices and disagreement as open as possible. How can this be realised in practice?

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Answers to this question are also sought in debates on television, in the press and on social media – where conflicts and polarisation often predominate. And, importantly, teachers and pupils in Flanders are actively looking for ways to deal constructively with conflicts. The classroom is a pedagogical space where young people are given the opportunity to better understand the world and to prepare themselves to take on a meaningful role in it.

Moreover, what happens in the world manifests itself in the classroom: in tense relationships between pupils, or when a controversial topic leads to lively discussions or even strong disagreement. When the latter happens, teachers must set to work to steer quarrels and conflicts in the right direction. But the question is also broader: how can teachers proactively and concretely work with their pupils on themes such as non-violence and peace?

Perspectives on the world

The curricular attainment targets are an obvious starting point when seeking answers to this question. These attainment targets provide the framework for what pupils should know and be able to do. In the autumn of 2021, the Flemish Peace Institute started a research project that will map out more precisely how teachers, within the framework of the attainment targets, can translate various aspects of peace education into concrete pedagogy and methods. Peace education as such is not mentioned in the learning goals. But whoever reads the attainment targets through a peace education lens will come across quite a few starting points. In Flanders, three important elements of the attainment targets for citizenship education are living together in a diverse society, dialogue and conflict transformation. Reflecting on war and peace in different historical periods is mentioned in the history attainment targets. And looking at peace education with a panoramic lens reveals possibilities in other educational objectives, such as those concerning sustainable development and climate. Thus, the attainment targets offer sufficient orientation points to reflect on conflict and peace in the classroom.

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To work with pupils on global aspects of conflict and peace, teachers can also start from current developments in international politics. The challenge then is to bring these issues into pupils' worlds in a tangible and understandable way. The thematic and didactic options in this area are, of

course, numerous. Anyone who follows the news with some attention will find sufficient inspiration for classroom discussions. But it also makes sense to dig a little deeper and bring up less obvious themes. For example, in an advisory report on nuclear disarmament issued in November 2021, the Peace Institute advocated for a focus in educational contexts on a better geopolitical understanding of the world and specifically of the issue of nuclear weapons. Another – and very concrete – method, which the Peace Institute explored in 2021 through a webinar and discussions with teachers, is to have students think about the Nobel Peace Prize. In spring 2022, we put the idea into practice.

Who will get the Nobel Peace Prize?

The Norwegian Nobel Committee, which awards the Peace Prize every year, stipulates in its regulations that not only members of parliament and academics but also directors of peace institutes may nominate a candidate. In 2021, the Peace Institute decided to collaborate with pupils from Flemish schools to search for a valuable candidate. We joined forces with students from the vocational programme of the Atlas College in Genk. The project took shape over several phases. In a preparatory phase, the pupils examined a list of possible candidates in class. This list was provided by the Peace Institute with the goal of inspiring the pupils, who were also allowed to nominate their own candidates. They subsequently narrowed the list down to a shortlist of six candidates. On 27 January 2022, we began the next phase with the pupils in the Flemish Parliament. In a number of workshops, the pupils examined phenomena such as conflict and peace, non-violent resistance and the importance of press freedom. Afterwards, the pupils entered into a dialogue with each other about the three candidates they considered most suitable. After a vote, the pupils chose to nominate COVAX as their candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. COVAX is a programme of the World Health Organization, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. COVAX aims to make COVID-19 vaccines available to all countries worldwide, regardless of their wealth.

Three elements of the exercise are worth highlighting. Firstly, the students were not only provided with information about peace but were also actively involved as researchers and participants in the decision-making process. Having examined the merits of various individuals and organisations, they engaged in dialogue to select suitable candi-

dates for the Peace Prize. Through a democratic vote, they determined the final nomination of the Peace Institute. Secondly, by practising dialogue, the pupils were able to work on themes related to “big” peace questions (non-violence and peace in world politics). And thirdly, the exercise offered an interesting angle through which pupils could reflect on the difficult and diffuse concept of “positive peace”. By this notion, we mean that peace is more than the absence of violence (what we call “negative peace”). By examining both the laureates of the Peace Prize in recent years and possible candidates for the prize in 2022, the pupils were able to explore in a tangible manner what elements are important for such a positive peace, such as the right to education, freedom of opinion and of the press, the democratic rule of law, dialogue and international cooperation, and the fights against hunger and sexual violence.

Thus, in 2021 and 2022, we took the first important steps in a project that we hope will inspire many more pedagogical professionals, schools and pupils in the coming years to reflect on what conflict and peace mean – both in their own lives and in society, nationally and internationally.

THE INSPIRATION ROUTE: PEACE, THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND FLEMISH POLICY – AN INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE OF IDEAS



Through occasional English-language webinars, the Flemish Peace Institute ensures that research results become even more accessible to an international audience.

TEXT: ANNELIES PAUWELS

Researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute

Violent extremism and conflicts are increasingly intertwined. Conflicts – and their consequences – often provide an ideal breeding ground for radicalisation. Terrorist groups also tend to thrive in conflict zones, especially in situations where there is chaos and insecurity, the rule of law is absent, and the population has little or no access to basic services. Terrorist groups then fill these gaps by taking over the role of the government and gaining the support of the population.

Terrorism itself, however, is regularly a driver of conflict. Terrorist incidents themselves have major impacts on the dynamics of conflicts, but terrorist groups also often act as disruptors: their attacks and acts of violence aim to derail negotiations and reignite the conflict, either during the negotiation phase or in the post-conflict period, by increasing instability and insecurity and instigating tensions between population groups.¹ It is therefore not surprising that hotbeds of conflict and violent extremism often coincide geographically. Think of countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.²

¹ See, for example, Andreas Schädel & Hans J. Giessmann (2020), De-exceptionalizing the terrorist phenomenon: lessons and concepts from conflict prevention and transformation, in: Alex P. Schmid, Handbook on Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

² See, for example, Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2020: measuring the impact of terrorism (2020), <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>.

The prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE) is taking on an ever greater role in international policy and cooperation aimed at conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. There is a clear connection – and even a great deal of overlap – between these different areas of work. Both peacebuilding initiatives and actions to prevent violent extremism, for example, attempt to address complex causes, and those causes are often related. They also place similar priorities and mechanisms at the centre of their work, such as a local, contextualised and inclusive approach. The two work areas are also often faced with similar challenges, such as difficulties in developing multilevel cooperation, challenges in promoting an approach that does not start at the top but at the local level (e.g. in the field), and issues with measuring often elusive results.³

Investing in the prevention of violent extremism and working for peace, therefore, often run parallel to one another. If we interpret the concept of “peace” in a negative sense as the absence of war or direct violence, then prevention helps by enabling intervention in radicalisation processes, slowing them down and thus averting violence. But even if we interpret the concept of “peace” positively, as a state of non-violence, sustainability and justice, a structural and society-wide P/CVE policy can have positive effects – for example, by enabling actors to work on the root causes of conflicts, strengthening the resilience of vulnerable population groups and promoting an inclusive society.

The Flemish P/CVE policy and the international exchange of ideas

How does Flanders’ P/CVE policy then tie in with peace-promoting initiatives in other countries? The Flemish government is responsible for the preventive aspects of Belgium’s counter-terrorism policy and largely developed its policy in the aftermath of the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon – which saw many Belgians citizens travel to Syria and Iraq to join extremist groups – and the terrorist attacks in the period 2014–2016. An explicit choice was made to build on knowledge and experience present in other countries that had already been confronted with violent extremism. Thus, several delegations of the Flemish government were sent to other countries that had already developed a broad policy for the prevention of violent extremism. An example that influenced the Flemish approach was the Danish city of Århus, which places multi-agency cooperation between the municipality, police services and external partners at the centre of its anti-radicalisation policy. A number of Flemish cities and municipalities that had seen many young people leave for conflict zones in Syria and Iraq also built on experiences from abroad in developing their local approach. In addition, the insights

³ See, for example, Georgia Holmer, *Countering violent extremism: a peacebuilding perspective* (2013), <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR336-Countering%20Violent%20Extremism-A%20Peacebuilding%20Perspective.pdf>; Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, *Preventing violent extremism (PVE) through development* (2017), https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2020/12/01125322/s209461_thematicoverview_preventing_violent_extremism_webb-003_final.pdf.

developed within the framework of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), a European Commission network in which practitioners in the various member states share their experiences and expertise, played an important role in the development of the Flemish P/CVE policy.

Since the approval of its first P/CVE action plan in 2015, the Flemish government has taken many steps to (further) develop and evaluate its integrated and comprehensive P/CVE policy. At the request of the Flemish Agency for Home Affairs, the Peace Institute took on this last task. The Peace Institute carried out an evaluation of the action plan in general and of a few sub-domains in particular, such as the government's support of the local approach to violent extremism, the preventive efforts in the education sector and the way in which youth (welfare) work was involved in the action plan. Several recommendations from this 2020 study – such as the need for stronger focuses on the digital dimension of radicalisation, support for victims of terrorism and hate crimes, and the reintegration of radicalised prisoners – were subsequently included in the new Flemish action plan that was approved in 2021.

On the basis of this evaluation, the Peace Institute also identified a few inspiring practices and ideas from Flanders that could be useful in initiatives in other countries. In the Flemish P/CVE policy, for example, there is a strong focus on coordination and cooperation between the sectors involved, including by means of top-down and bottom-up information flows and knowledge dissemination. A network of contact points and key people in the various domains involved in the policy plays a positive role in this regard. The Flemish government encourages local authorities to take on a leading role in P/CVE and also provides financial resources for this purpose. In addition, supra-local consultation and cooperation structures have been set up. Central to this local approach are the Local Integrated Security Cells on Radicalisation (LISC-Rs) – multidisciplinary roundtables at a local level in which radicalisation issues are discussed. Our interviews with key persons in a number of these roundtables also yielded valuable insights into how to remove some of the barriers to multidisciplinary cooperation.

Context is of great importance in peace-promoting activities; what works in a certain context is not necessarily effective in another. How can Flanders now link this acquired knowledge back to other contexts and thus contribute to initiatives that work towards positive and negative peace? In this respect, some steps have already been taken. For instance, a new group of Flemish experts is now active in the RAN network, which offers them the opportunity to share experiences with experts from other member states. Also, some local authorities have been motivated to pass on their knowledge to their counterparts in other countries. The Peace Institute, which has developed a solid international network thanks to a whole series of European projects, also plays a role in this transfer of knowledge. In March 2021, for instance, we organised an international webinar to highlight the good practices and lessons from the Flemish P/CVE policy and to link these to practices from other countries and to the recently updated counter-ter-

rorism agenda of the European Commission. Moreover, the Peace Institute is itself actively involved in the activities of the RAN – for example, by writing specialised notes, participating in expert meetings, and exchanging knowledge and experience.

The need to exchange good practices and experience with European and other international partners will undoubtedly remain great in the future. Regardless of how the situation evolves, the Flemish authorities will find in the Peace Institute a solid partner for the continued international dissemination of research and experience on P/CVE within the framework of a peace-oriented foreign policy.

Evaluation report of the Scientific Council 2021

4 MARCH 2022

The Scientific Council evaluates the quality of the research of the Flemish Peace Institute and advises the board of directors and the Scientific Secretariat about important trends in research on peace and security.

As in previous years, the Scientific Council's assessment of the quality of the Peace Institute's research has focused mainly on the institute's own publications. However, the council follows with interest the numerous other activities of the institute, including lectures and contributions of researchers to other events. In 2021, the Flemish Peace Institute demonstrated that it could continue to play an active role despite the complications caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It also professionally hosted a significant number of webinars, thus providing a space for the presentation of its research and for discussion and reflection with stakeholders. In addition, a way was found to allow events for a broad audience to take place digitally. Other events, such as the 11 November Lecture and a roundtable discussion on polarisation, were able to take place live.

The Scientific Council very much encourages the researchers' participation in international scientific networks and conferences. The researchers' contributions to meetings of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in The Hague, the Stockholm Criminology Symposium and other events offer them opportunities to share their findings with foreign researchers and policy-makers, and also provide them with opportunities to place their own analyses and insights in a comparative perspective. Moreover, the Scientific Council is of the opinion that this international orientation is in no way detrimental to the way in which the Flemish Peace Institute manifests itself in the Flemish public domain. During 2021, links were made between the research and current affairs in all sorts of ways (masterclasses, roundtable discussions and lectures), as a result of which policy-makers, welfare workers, administrators, elected representatives and teachers have become involved in the work of the Peace Institute.

During its meeting in June 2021, the Scientific Council exchanged views with the researchers and director about strategic choices for both research domains ("Weapons,

peace and violence” and “Conflict, peace and society”) and also about how to give substance to the institute’s role as a platform for peace. The Scientific Council believes that the institute can properly fulfil such a platform function and, as a result, will increasingly be able to open up the international research and the activities of fellow institutes to a Flemish audience.

As mentioned in previous reports, the Scientific Council has seen the Peace Institute grow into a respected source of reliable information and empirical advice to the Flemish Parliament. As in previous years, this assessment is structured around the two thematic research domains in which the Peace Institute works.

Weapons, peace and violence

Since its foundation, research into the trade in and use of weapons has been the core activity of the Peace Institute. Several reports and analysis notes on the trade in and regulation of weapons were published in 2022²⁰²¹, including within the framework of the European research projects DIVERT and TARGET.

Quitterie de Labbey, Nils Duquet and Lore Smets conducted research on firearms theft in the European Union. Matteo Dressler, Nils Duquet and Julie Eckelmann wrote about non-regularised firearms in the European Union, and Nils Duquet and Dennis Vanden Auweele published *Project TARGET: Targeting gun violence & trafficking in Europe*.

The Scientific Council is very enthusiastic about these reports. The investigations are thorough and accurate and are reported in an insightful manner. Significant added value is created by laying the groundwork for a comparative European perspective on the theft, trafficking and use of firearms – and linking all of this to lethal firearms violence.

In addition, in 2021 the Flemish Peace Institute published research that primarily aimed to provide more insight into the Flemish situation. Diederik Cops was responsible for three publications: *Firearms possession in Flanders: motives & challenges for the control system, the fact sheet The Flemish foreign arms trade in 2020 and the note End-use controls of defence-related goods: the current Flemish and European legal and administrative framework*. The last paper offers a good overview of the current decrees and the European and Flemish regulations on arms exports, with an emphasis on how the end use of weapons and components should be taken into account when assessing export licences. This note provides a clear outline of the existing regulations, situating them within a broader framework. The research was carefully conducted and well documented. Finally, the issue of the transit of military goods was addressed in the report *Under the radar – Transit of military goods: from licensing to controls*, by Diederik Cops and Kathleen Vanheeuverswyn. The scientific reviewer praised this last report for its “thorough search for relevant information”.

Among the research reports in this field, mention should also be made of *International nuclear disarmament and policy options for Belgium and Flanders*, commissioned by the Peace Institute and authored by Lode Dewaegheneire, Veronica Vella and Sylvain Palle-Calvo. Given the most recent developments in Europe and the war in Ukraine, the urgency of empirical research into the trade in and availability of various types of weapon, including nuclear weapons, has only increased.

The Scientific Council judged these reports to be of excellent scientific quality and underlines that the Peace Institute continues to manifest itself as a source of knowledge and insight about the significance of firearms and the arms trade in Belgium and Flanders in particular.

Conflict, peace and society

In this research domain, many activities were developed in 2021 in which earlier research – especially the extensive evaluation of the Flemish action plan on radicalisation and the research on dealing with polarisation in the classroom – was discussed with various stakeholders (in webinars, roundtable discussions and lectures). But there was also a new publication by Maarten Van Alstein titled *Polarisation, conflict and peace* that examined how to deal non-violently with contrasts and tensions. This memorandum offers a clear and relevant framework for talking about polarisation. Particularly, it contains helpful insights on the distinctions between ideological and affective polarisation and useful reflections on the different dynamics in and on normative appreciation of the different forms of polarisation. In an accessible way, it describes the state of thinking and research on polarisation, and it illuminates the Flemish context and practice. The literature study is very thorough. The author navigates between general guidelines and context- or situation-specific indications. The reviewer remarked that it would have been possible to reflect further on the institutional settings (schools, debate centres, interactions in the street, social media) in the “scenarios”, and to make clear what types of social interaction are relevant in those situations and contexts (whether a discussion, a citizens’ meeting, a sports activity or a lesson at school).

In addition, a report based on a study conducted by researchers at KU Leuven on online polarisation will be published shortly. This research is also interesting and the scientific reviewer stated that the report offers good insights into the various types of user of social media, how arguments are constructed and how affective polarisation takes shape; the reviewer further commented that the report links these findings to advice to users of social media on how to prevent unwanted polarisation.

Finally, the Scientific Council was pleased to see that the researchers in this domain were very active in 2021 in further promoting the insights in the reports through external publications. Maarten Van Alstein, for example, co-wrote a contribution for the

Agonistic Museum and was also involved in the development of material to help teachers discuss controversial themes in the classroom. Annelies Pauwels succeeded in developing her knowledge and skills in a broader context by contributing to three international publications.

In conclusion, the Scientific Council believes that the research carried out by the team of researchers associated with the Flemish Peace Institute was up to date, comprehensive and of excellent quality.

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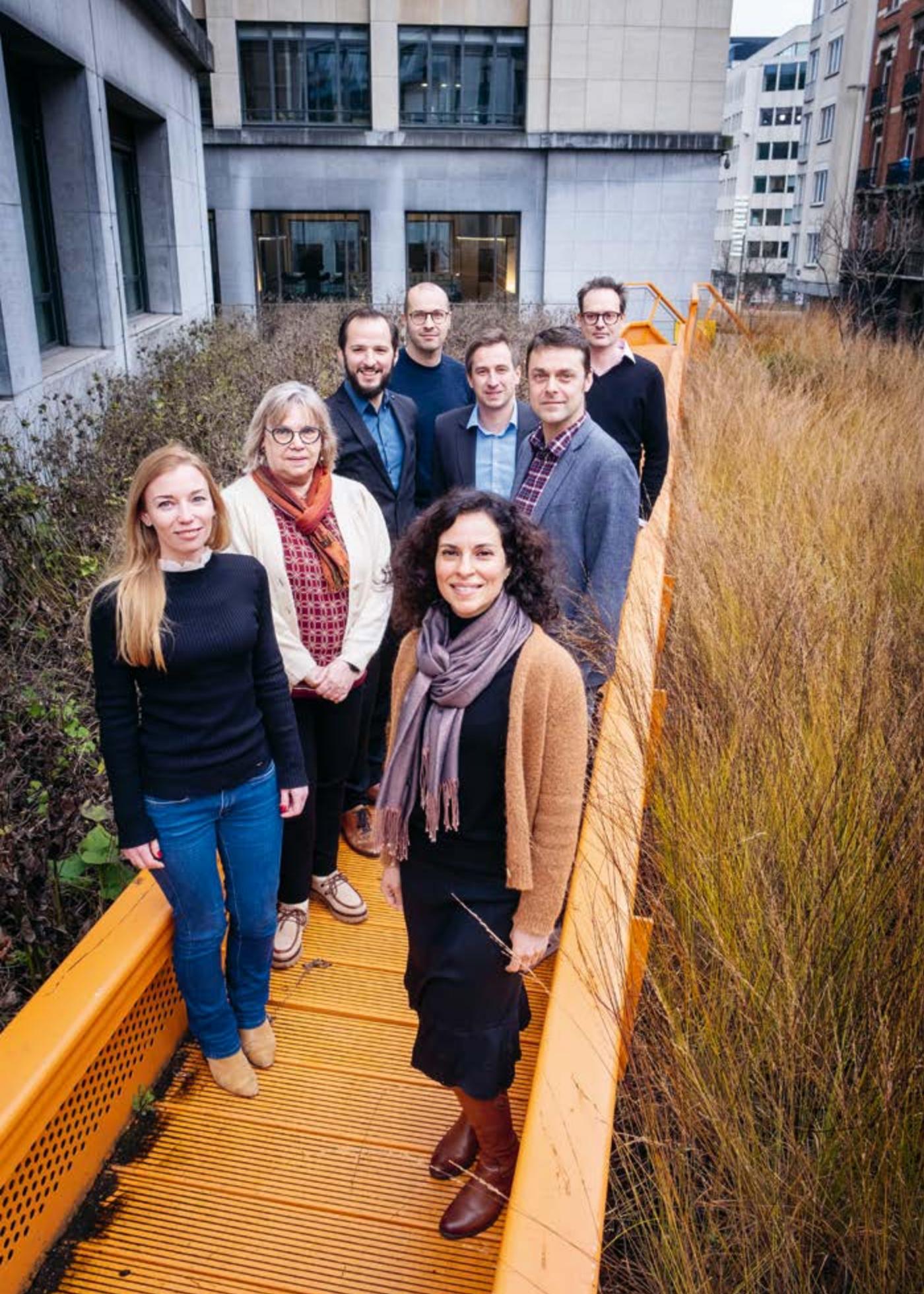
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