

FRICITION:

ON PEACE
AND HOW TO
MAKE PEACE
RESILIENT

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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FOREWORD: ABOUT 2025, FRICTION AND RESILIENT PEACE



NILS DUQUET, DIRECTOR OF THE FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE

Friction is the theme of this year's annual report of the Flemish Peace Institute. From a bird's eye view, Flanders seems to be an oasis of calm amid large-scale conflicts around the world. But anyone who lives, works or is involved in politics here knows better. Friction certainly caused many sparks in 2025.

In 2025, we witnessed diverse groups making their voices heard. Farmers took to the streets in protest against EU policy. Trade unions organised strikes and mass protests for higher wages and additional investment in healthcare, welfare, culture and the social economy. Business leaders and industrial workers sounded the alarm about high energy costs and increasing regulatory pressure. The climate coalition, for its part, organised a new march to demand more ambitious climate policy.

Geopolitics also caused friction, with tensions between Kurdish and Turkish immigrants and frustration over the lack of international action in response to new atrocities in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Examples of large-scale expressions of friction were seen in the crowds that repeatedly took to the streets in Belgium to urge our country's federal and regional governments to take more decisive action on the war and violations of international humanitarian law in Israel and Palestine.

This conflict caused serious friction in the Flemish Parliament. For example, there was much debate about the Flemish competence for culture and whether the decision of the

board of directors of the Festival of Flanders to cancel a concert with an Israeli conductor do or do not guide our cultural policy. Another important competence, education, also distantly felt the effects of the war in Israel and Palestine. For many years, but certainly since the barbaric attack by Hamas and the tens of thousands of deaths resulting from the large-scale violence of the Israeli regime in Palestine, our universities and colleges have been struggling with their academic collaborations with Israel. Once again, they are facing a turbulent academic year, even though they have been asking the competent minister since autumn 2024 to force clarity at European level on the modalities for at least temporarily withdrawing from these collaborations. Teachers and school administrators in secondary schools are also feeling the heat and noticing polarisation rising about Palestine.

Another important Flemish competence, education, also distantly felt the effects of the war in Israel and Palestine. For many years, our universities and colleges have been struggling with their academic collaborations with Israel.

Flanders is therefore anything but immune to the kind of friction that often originates in extremely unstable geopolitical contexts. Dealing with this friction constructively is difficult at the individual level; it is a challenge that we must take up as a society. The idea of “resilient peace”, the benchmark of the strategic plan that will guide the Flemish Peace Institute in the coming years, can offer direction.

At the local level, “resilient peace” involves, among other things, strengthening conflict management skills in schools, helping young people resist the temptations of financial crime and extremism, and strengthening the collective capacities of citizens to organise themselves in times of crisis.

Strengthening resilience involves much more than advising citizens to stock up on emergency supplies. All that achieves is to individualise responsibility, absolve governments of their duty, and increase fear and stress. What is more effective is to promote resilience at a collective level – for example, by encouraging cooperation in an apartment building, a street or an association. This collective approach to resilience fosters a sense of community, which can reduce stress and anxiety. Local authorities and civil society organisations have an important role to play in this.

Consider, for example, the emergency generators that are being installed in various locations in Kyiv so that citizens can charge their phones. Or the coordination of volunteers in crises such as floods. The core of the message is that people are not alone when an emergency occurs. As long as it is not a new pandemic, the call is to make contact with your neighbours and the people in your community.

Is resilient peace then a call to stay safe in our locality, in the cocoon of our neighbourhood, our school, our association? Not at all. Work on resilient peace also happens internationally. In our advisory note on the Flemish Defence Plan, we therefore strongly advocate a renewed commitment to and investment in diplomacy and international cooperation (both bilateral and multilateral). Flanders can and must take advantage of its proximity to many important international institutions – and, above all, the availability of an experienced diplomatic corps – to remain an international pioneer of multilateralism and international law.

Work on resilient peace also happens internationally. In our advisory note on the Flemish Defence Plan, we therefore strongly advocate a renewed commitment to and investment in diplomacy and international cooperation.

However, the privileged, diplomatic position of Brussels is under pressure. In its 2025 annual report, the federal prosecutor's office noted "an increasing use of complex interference mechanisms by foreign powers seeking to destabilise Belgian and European institutions". It referred explicitly to Russia and the scandal surrounding influence via the controversial "news site" Voice of Europe.

Such scandals undermine the credibility of international institutions on our territory in an insidious, toxic way. They foster anti-politics and undermine our efforts to protect our institutions and the European project from aggressive regimes such as Putin's.

The international media is watching with suspicion as the Belgian judiciary struggles, for example, with the handling of corruption cases in the European Parliament. The difficulties encountered by the judiciary and security services in stopping shootings and drug-related violence do not go unnoticed in the diplomatic bubble in Brussels.

However, while NATO's budgets are growing by billions, the judiciary is struggling with a lack of funds, dilapidated buildings and demotivated staff. Local authorities, youth workers and street workers are also reporting major budgetary shortfalls that prevent them from doing enough to prevent problematic drug use and even extremism and violence. This is creating gaps. Criminals, hostile regimes and extremists are exploiting these gaps to undermine our democratic system through brutal violence, sabotage or corruption. Yet our democracy is an essential pillar of a resilient peace.

Meanwhile, pressure on NATO member states to increase their military contributions continues to grow. It is not only the Russian invasion that has brought matters to a head. President Trump's statements that he would not rule out military action against an ally are also undermining old certainties. At the end of February 2025, the public reprimanding of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy by Donald Trump and US Vice-President J.D. Vance in the White House proved to be a rude awakening for many policy-makers and opinion makers. In the days following that heated discussion, numerous European politicians abruptly stepped up their calls for greater European military power. Some policy-makers stated that Europe was already at war.

In light of the growing uncertainty surrounding international alliances, it is justified – and necessary – to scale up Europe's defence capabilities. We must be able to counter any Russian aggression and assist our allies in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. Without a fully fledged defence force, a resilient peace is a utopia.

However, not only peace activists but also many ordinary citizens are wondering whether all this extra defence budget will be at the expense of investments in other areas, such as diplomacy, international cooperation, education and social policy. These are legitimate questions. They confirm the importance of a broad-based and democratic public debate about our response to current threats.

Transparency and democratic scrutiny are essential to advance this debate. After all, more and more resources are being channelled into defence and security. If there is insufficient democratic and parliamentary control, there is a risk of waste – something we can ill afford in these financially difficult times.

If there is insufficient democratic and parliamentary control over defence spending, there is a risk of waste – something we can ill afford in these financially difficult times.

So, should we place all our hopes in our politicians? Not if we take the idea of resilient peace as a collective societal challenge seriously. In a democratic constitutional state, that crucial component of resilient peace – the legislature, government and administration – is bound by the constitution. Patricia Popelier, lawyer and professor at the University of Antwerp, recently put it this way: "The

constitution is a moral compass. It lays down values that we share as a society: freedom, equality, human dignity and sustainability. For our government, these values are a beacon and a

guide. We decide together what they mean in concrete terms – not one government, one judge or a random majority. Political primacy means that elected politicians are the first to interpret what those values mean in a specific case, in this society, at this moment in time. They do not do this alone. Their decisions must always reflect what is happening in society. To this end, they receive assistance from citizens, civil society, the media, or advisory councils.”¹

The Flemish Peace Institute is one such advisory body. Thanks to the support of the Flemish Parliament and the invaluable assistance of the parliamentary services, we are able to conduct research that is not done anywhere else. This research makes our recommendations, which are based on the research, as useful as possible for policy-makers.

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With its advisory notes, the Flemish Peace Institute has repeatedly succeeded in transcending friction in recent years. Further on in this annual report, you will find many examples of how we did this in 2025. We want to continue working with the same enthusiasm in the coming years. It is clear that this will not be easy. Many political issues and socially “hot topics” – such as

the Arms Trade Decree, the Flemish Defence Plan, investment in military equipment, arms possession, illegal arms trade and violence, the Flemish action plan on violent radicalisation, polarisation in education, and an Eastern Strategy focused on cooperation with Ukraine – are directly related to the research of the Flemish Peace Institute. The discussions on these issues are being conducted – in the Flemish Parliament, in our own country and beyond – on a knife edge.

1 VISIE, Kom op voor onze grondwet, voor het te laat is (28 January 2026), <https://visie.net/de-gids-artikel/kom-op-voor-onze-grondwet-voor-het-te-laet-is>

Many political issues and socially “hot topics” – such as the Arms Trade Decree, the Flemish Defence Plan, investment in military equipment, arms possession, trade and violence, the Flemish action plan on violent radicalisation, polarisation in education, and an Eastern Strategy focused on cooperation with Ukraine – are directly related to the research of the Flemish Peace Institute.

Moreover, many of the political choices that result from these discussions will have a real and tangible impact on the lives of Flemish people, affecting how much room policy-makers have for manoeuvre in the decades to come. This is precisely why the Flemish Peace Institute and its (new) Board of Directors want and need to continue in the coming years, as reported in the brand new strategic plan, “to clarify the choices that need to be made with high-quality and useful scientific research and constructive advice”.

The Flemish Peace Institute is determined to do this with an open and realistic view of the future – averse to dogma, but with an inherent desire for peace, rooted in Flanders’ war history and in the founding decree of the institute. Even then, friction cannot be ruled out. But friction also has positive aspects; it can generate energy and, in some cases, even a beautiful glow. And aren’t those precisely what we need in dark times?

PEACE INSTITUTE 2025 IN FIGURES

Friction and conflict as oxygen

Friction, polarisation... Partly as a result of numerous geopolitical crises and pressures on the economy, events that could be described as “conflicts” also occurred in Flanders in 2025. Was 2025 a year to be quickly forgotten?

Peace researcher Katherine Bickmore aptly sums this up with her metaphor of conflict as oxygen: an essential and inescapable element of life – and at the same time explosive. Anyone who lives or works with others will be confronted with conflict and polarisation from time to time. That is inevitable. However, conflict and polarisation do not necessarily have to result in damage. Whether the friction builds to an explosion, depends largely on how we deal with it: destructively, or constructively and non-violently.

In the following pages, you will find eight short summaries of how the Flemish Peace Institute has taken a constructive approach to explosive issues such as defence, strategic export control, radicalisation, firearms, Flemish foreign policy, conflict in the classroom and learning about violence.

In February 2025, the Flemish Peace Institute published an analysis of ten years of Flemish radicalisation policy

Radicalisation policy: beyond a flash in the pan

The many faces of violent radicalisation

Flemish radicalisation policy emerged ten years ago in response to the issue of terrorist fighters of Belgian nationality leaving for and coming back from Syria. In its early stages, the policy was strongly driven by urgency and moments of crisis.



Annelies Pauwels, researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute:

“Today, violent radicalisation continues to exist, but the phenomenon is changing: there is greater ideological diversity, growing activity by lone actors and small cells, and a strong online dimension. Developments can occur very rapidly. The conflict in Iran and the surrounding region may introduce threats from a new direction. Addressing the current threat landscape is no longer possible with a crisis-driven ad hoc approach; there is a need for a structural and sustainable approach.”

A major bottleneck in current policy is the difficulty of developing a society-wide approach in which government actors and civil society organisations truly join forces.

Annelies Pauwels: *“Good cooperation is only possible with a clear division of roles and a coherent strategy, so that everyone knows when and how to contribute. Crucial to this is a clear vision with concrete objectives and recognition of violent radicalisation within broader social and security challenges. In practice, this is difficult. We see the difficulty, for example, in many Local Integrated Security Cells on Radicalisation (LISC-Rs): some sectors are reluctant to participate, and there is often a lack of a shared framework for thinking and acting. The need for a certain degree of standardisation is real, but steps forward – for example, in the areas of intake procedures, risk assessment, transparency, training, monitoring and evaluation – are certainly possible.”*



2025: a year of friction over radicalisation

In 2024, the Flemish Government approved a new decree on the prevention of violent radicalisation, extremism, terrorism and harmful polarisation. In 2025, the third action plan on violent radicalisation and harmful polarisation followed. It was the first concrete implementation of the decree.

Nils Duquet, director of the Flemish Peace Institute: *“Policy on radicalisation rarely comes about without friction and heated political debate. In 2025, there was intense discussion, rightly so, about when radical ideas become extremism and violent radicalisation. Such discussions touch the core of the Flemish Peace Institute.”*

After all, the founding decree of the Peace Institute refers to it as an organisation not only for peace but also for violence prevention. By consciously looking at problems such as violent radicalisation through a preventive lens, we can bring new perspectives to policy-makers.

Nils Duquet: *“The online aspect seems to be playing an even greater role than before in the radicalisation process and network formation. Online activities are increasingly becoming the bridge that leads to violence. However, when developing online initiatives, prevention workers still too often face uncertainty, about, for example, who will do what, what works and what doesn’t, and what is permitted within the current legislative framework. With our research project Ask Olg-A, which was in full swing in 2025 and will end in 2026, we want to offer local authorities, youth services, street workers and other local frontline personnel starting points for modernising their operations and strengthening their online presence.”*

In recent years, the Flemish Peace Institute has also conducted several studies on the LISC-R approach. LISC-Rs are local roundtables where various partners, drawing on their own expertise, engage in dialogue about possible cases of violent radicalisation. They assess the cases jointly and follow them up where necessary. In the coming years, the institute will investigate the possibilities and limitations of such multidisciplinary roundtables for the prevention of various forms of violence, not only violent radicalisation and harmful polarisation.

The contribution of the Flemish Peace Institute, weighed and considered

Gert Vercauteren, director of the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis

“The Peace Institute’s analysis rightly emphasises the need for a whole-of-society approach, with the LISC-R as its central starting point. This vision is fully in line with the national strategy against terrorism, extremism and the radicalisation process (Strategy TER), which the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (CUTA) has been actively promoting for years.

The analysis by the Flemish Peace Institute underlines the importance of the LISC-R as the cornerstone of the preventive approach to radicalisation. It advocates strengthening the LISC-R through standardisation, improved information sharing and the firm embedding of socio-preventive actors (i.e. bodies focused on countering radicalisation in the community). The fact that Flemish policy is now aligned with these recommendations is a valuable addition to the coordinating and awareness-raising role that CUTA plays with regard to local authorities, security actors and socio-preventive partners.”

In June 2025, the Flemish Peace Institute published a report and an advisory note on Ukraine

Cooperating with Ukraine and the Eastern Strategy

A deeply rooted study

At the request of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Flemish Parliament, the Flemish Peace Institute produced a detailed overview of the support Flanders has given to Ukraine since the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022. In addition, there was a need to shape the future of cooperation with Ukraine, so we also looked ahead. This was possible because researcher Merel Selleslach did not limit herself to literature and policy documents.



Merel Selleslach, researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute: *“It was important to interview those directly involved in Flemish policy on Ukraine. For the study, we spoke to more than 100 participants from Flanders and Ukraine. The input and cooperation of the Ukrainian participants proved indispensable. They speak the language and know their own country, its needs and its sensitivities. In this way, we tested the ideas from the focus groups in Flanders against the real needs, wishes and expectations of people in Ukraine. We also listened to*

Ukrainians who currently live in Flanders. They believe it is important to be actively involved as bridge builders between Flanders and Ukraine. Fostering dialogue and reciprocity ultimately became a key recommendation that we included in our advisory note. It is a recommendation we also take to heart when we are disseminating our results. Together with the Ukrainian organisation PR Army, for example, we organised a closed event for policy-makers and stakeholders involved in Flemish policy towards Ukraine. During the event, Olena Yahupova testified about her imprisonment and torture by Russian troops in Ukraine. This made the importance of Flemish support for Ukraine tangible.”

The research and conversations that took place during and after the publication of the report also prompted a call to dare to take steps towards reconstruction now.

Merel Selleslach: *“Buildings and infrastructure may be vulnerable to destruction, but during war time it is possible to invest in people. The networks needed for this should be built as quickly as possible.”*

No friction, but broad solidarity

In the Flemish Coalition Agreement of 2024, the government committed itself to developing an Eastern Strategy with the aim of strengthening cooperation with Ukraine, Poland and the internationally recognised Belarusian democratic movement.

Nils Duquet: *“The Peace Institute’s research and advice show that an Eastern Strategy is crucial to anchoring the vision of Flemish cooperation with Ukraine. After all, the available budgets are modest, so a targeted approach is essential to ensure a clear impact on Ukraine’s recovery. Fortunately, we note that the issue remains high on the agenda, with various parliamentary questions and resolutions on the Eastern Strategy and Flemish support for Ukraine in the Foreign Affairs Committee.”*

There has been widespread solidarity with Ukraine in Flanders since February 2022. Citizens, civil society organisations, cultural associations, youth organisations, cities, municipalities and other bodies have organised various grassroots activities in support of Ukraine and of Ukrainians in Flanders. At the political level, Flemish policy has focused on the reception and integration of Ukrainian refugees, on the one hand, and on humanitarian aid to Ukraine, on the other. In addition, both the Flemish Parliament and the government immediately expressed their solidarity with Ukraine.



Olena Yahupova giving her testimony on 6 November 2025 in the Flemish Parliament



Nils Duquet: “Flanders has a number of powers at its disposal to support the social fabric in Ukraine – through health, youth, education, employment and so on – even though the war is not yet over. Even a modest Flemish budget can have an impact – for example, by focusing on pilot projects, twinning activities and capacity-building. It is positive and important that the Flemish Government recently adopted several new support measures for Ukraine. At the end of 2025, for example, the government approved a new subsidy of €250,000 for cultural reconstruction in Ukraine through a partnership with UNESCO. In January 2026, the government activated the new Humanitarian Emergency Fund Flanders for the first time to provide Ukraine with emergency generators in collaboration with the Red Cross Flanders. Additionally, in February 2026, the Flemish Government published its Eastern Strategy, with Ukraine as its starting point. This motivates us to continue to follow up on the strategy, but also to build on the insights of the report on Flanders’ international cooperation with Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Peace Institute is also conducting research into Flemish policy towards Israel and Palestine.”

The contribution of the Peace Institute, weighed and considered

Lucille Lamaker, policy officer for international cultural policy at the Department of Culture, Youth and Media

“Ukraine is a new area of policy, with new collaborations in the context of a country at war and under high pressure. The insights of the Peace Institute and the different perspectives of those involved are therefore invaluable.

We are taking a number of recommendations to heart: seeking multiplier effects through pilot projects, knowledge and expertise exchange, training and capacity-building, focusing as much as possible on cooperation at various policy levels and in collaboration with local networks...

For culture, this means that we cooperate with UNESCO inside Ukraine. For example, we will support actions to strengthen the publishing industry, promoting reading, libraries and literary collaborations. We are also linking Flemish organisations and experts to this project. In this way, many organisations are gaining experience in cooperation with Ukraine and we are simultaneously strengthening UNESCO.”

In March 2025, the Flemish Peace Institute focused on financial institutions

The money behind the turn towards defence

Cautious banks

What motives and drivers guide the policies of financial institutions when they consider financing arms companies? And how successful are arms companies and national governments in their efforts to secure financing? The Flemish Peace Institute set to work on these two research questions at a time when European countries have announced major military investments.



Diederik Cops, researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute:

“Governments expect the European defence industry to scale up quickly and drastically. To do so, arms companies need access to private financial markets and financing instruments. But, according to representatives of the defence industry, securing this access is becoming increasingly difficult, with the recent emergence of so-called ESG [environmental, social and governance] criteria being the main reason.”

The debate could use some extra oxygen. Therefore, the Peace Institute delved into the publicly available policy documents of 15 major European banks. Together with interviews with key stakeholders, this resulted in a new report that provides a clearer picture of the considerations and legal obligations that guide the policies of financial institutions.

Diederik Cops: *“As in other sectors, banks take risks related to corruption, fraud, money laundering, terrorism, and undesirable end use and proliferation into account; however, they appear in principle willing to work with defence companies. This finding provides a basis for a more constructive dialogue between the defence sector and financial institutions regarding the prevailing concerns.”*

Friction over huge government budgets

Not only is the involvement of banks a difficult hurdle for the development of European defence companies but the size of the budgets involved is also causing fundamental discussions among politicians and relevant social actors. An additional annual government investment of more than €400 billion by all European NATO members combined, with more than €10 billion in Belgium alone, deserves at least a thorough debate. That debate has not yet taken place.



Nils Duquet: *“The biggest proponents of the investments use the argument of a lack of ‘defence literacy’ to justify the absence of debate. In this context, the need for secrecy is also often mentioned, because ‘the enemy is listening’. Both arguments are overly simplistic excuses to silence critical voices. Everyone understands that not all military information can simply be made public on the internet. But that does not relieve the government and policy-makers of their great responsibility to communicate clearly and transparently about the why, when and how of the planned investments when it comes to such far-reaching decisions.”*

When the discussion about financing, both public and private, truly gets into full swing, there is a risk that it will be conducted on a knife edge. After all, building up additional military strength threatens to swallow up a significant portion of available government budgets and overshadow other policy areas, even those that can also play an important role in peace and security.

Nils Duquet: *“In Europe, but also in Flanders, we need policy-makers who recognise the value of social cohesion and constructive conflict management at the local level. We need leaders who are committed to sustainable investment in public services such as education, justice and youth work; a robust democratic culture in which critical debate is central; and a strong civil society that connects and activates people. But it takes political courage to commit to this in these times.”*

Nils Duquet during the annual conference of the Peace Research Centre Prague at Charles University in Prague. © Peace Research Centre Prague



The contribution of the Peace Institute, weighed and considered Kenny Frederickx, director of Forum Ethibel

“For a long time, the exclusion of arms companies from sustainable financial products was a matter of course. Geopolitical shifts reignited the debate. The Peace Institute’s publication came at just the right moment, when financial institutions were considering various options for addressing the issue: from issuing defence bonds to deciding whether or not to adjust their policies at the level of the financial institution or at the level of their range of (sustainable) financial products. The European perspective on the topic made the publication – and the conference that followed – extremely useful for further debate, certainly at that moment in time.”

Three years after a previous analysis, the Flemish Peace Institute mapped out the same topic again in November 2025

The Flemish defence-related sector

Beyond the tipping point

Between 2021 and 2023, Belgian companies secured approximately €100 million in funding through the European Defence Fund (EDF); €47 million, or about half of the total, is earmarked for Flemish companies and research institutions.

Diederik Cops, researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute: *“In 2022, the Flemish Peace Institute wrote that the Flemish defence-related sector was at a tipping point. This shift was clearly confirmed in our most recent analysis of the Flemish defence sector. Since 2022, not only has the turnover of most of the identified companies increased but also Flemish companies and research institutions, both traditional and new, have been successful in participating in military innovation programmes, such as the EDF or the Belgian Defence-related Research Action.”*

Meanwhile, defence initiatives continue to appear in rapid succession. In the summer of 2025, the Federal Government announced that, as part of the accelerated increase in the Belgian defence budget to 2% of gross domestic product, more than €3 billion will be spent on military innovation projects between 2025 and 2033. In addition, on 6 February 2026, the Flemish Government launched the Flemish Innovation and Industry Strategy for Security and Defence.

Diederik Cops: *“Not only will more than €100 million be made available for military innovation projects in the coming years but also a Flemish defence fund will be set up. Additionally, various Flemish government agencies, such as Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT), will actively support the internationalisation of the Flemish defence sector. Monitoring and mapping the economic and social impact of these investments promises to be a serious challenge for the Flemish Peace Institute in the coming years.”*



Friction? A turnaround with risks

The transformation of the defence sector is not only catching the attention of the Flemish Peace Institute – a fact that became clear during the conference Investing in Defence: What Choices Is Flanders Making? We held this conference on 20 March 2025 in the Flemish Parliament for an audience of around 150 Members of Parliament and representatives of civil society, government agencies, industry and research institutions. The lively debates that took place on that day are reflected in the Flemish Peace Institute’s advisory note on the Flemish Defence Plan.

Nils Duquet: *“For Flemish defence-related companies, the transformation is driving growth. The Flemish Defence Plan gives them an extra boost. But the plan is not without risks. For example, it calls for more flexible criteria and faster-moving procedures for defence-related projects. This threatens to create an uneven playing field between project applicants: companies, researchers and research institutions may feel obliged to seek a link with defence in order to obtain a faster and more flexible assessment. Those who cannot or do not want to demonstrate such a link risk being disadvantaged. This could cause friction.”*



Minister-President Matthias Diependaele opened the conference on 20 March 2025

What we saw happening in 2025 – and, in fact, what we have seen since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine and the latest Flemish Coalition Agreement – is a significant turnaround in Flemish policy. New players, such as Participatiemaatschappij Vlaanderen (PMV) and Limburgse Reconversie­maatschappij (LRM), will now be actively investing money in the defence industry. However, they have little experience in actively supporting defence-related companies and research institutions, either financially or otherwise.

Nils Duquet: *“For the Peace Institute, it is important that these new players supplement the way they assess projects with new criteria – for example, in terms of (research) security, export control and foreign policy. It will also be important not to lose sight of the big picture in the coming years. The Flemish Government has a responsibility to ensure that investment companies such as PMV and LRM, but also FIT and VLAIO [Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship], are transparent about Flemish (financial) support for dual-use and defence innovation projects.”*



Lively panel discussions at the conference Investing in Defence: What Choices Is Flanders Making, with from left to right, Nils Duquet (Director, Flemish Peace Institute), Jolyce Demely (Managing Director, AGORIA Flanders), Steven Lauwereys (Chief Strategy & Policy Officer, Royal Higher Institute for Defence), Orry Van de Wauwer (Director, Pax Christi Flanders) and Koen Verlae­ckt (Secretary-General, Flemish Interuniversity Council)

In January 2025, the Flemish Peace Institute put due diligence back on the map

The defence sector and due diligence

A non-binding exercise?

Human rights and due diligence... at first glance, it seems that this duo (also known as Human Rights Due Diligence) is no longer important. After all, in recent months, the European Union has put on hold various legal instruments imposing binding obligations on European companies – the main motivation being concerns about the competitiveness of European industry.

Diederik Cops, researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute: *“I am convinced that this issue will not disappear from the agenda. The question of corporate responsibility – for example, in the context of a responsible arms trade – remains relevant. When the Arms Trade Treaty is discussed at the United Nations, human rights and due diligence are core concepts. Moreover, companies and research institutions are being given increasing responsibility to prevent any misuse or undesirable diversion of their knowledge, technologies or products. This was evident from other research we conducted in 2025 – research into the increasingly intertwined nature of civil and military applications.”*

Although companies and research institutions indicate that they are willing to take responsibility, this does raise a number of questions and challenges for them.

Diederik Cops: *“Defence companies in particular face major challenges in implementing human rights due diligence. After all, the weapons value chain is notoriously opaque and the greatest risks to human rights and international humanitarian law do not occur in the production process but rather downstream, when weapons are used and (not infrequently) abused.”*

Friction between theory and practice

Other sectors, such as mining and diamonds, face similar challenges. However, tools such as audits and blockchain are no guarantee of success in the defence sector due to its complexity and sensitivity, and indeed they already have their limitations in other sectors. Moreover, the very close intertwining with governments – often the only customer and regulator – means that those governments also have a crucial role to play, certainly in terms of the end use of defence industry products.

Nils Duquet: *“In theory, European countries apply the principle that their export policy should be cautious and responsible; considerations relating to conflict prevention, security, human rights and international humanitarian law should take precedence over industrial and economic matters. However, European practice is anything but clear-cut. For example, many EU countries continue to export heavily to countries in the Middle East with (more than) questionable reputations, despite protests from EU member states with more cautious policies.”*

In Flanders, capacity-building in companies and research institutions and the exchange of (sensitive) information with the government and security services are among the main priorities to be tackled. This is according to research conducted by the Flemish Peace Institute in 2024 and 2025, which surveyed many companies, research institutions, control agencies and civil society organisations.

Nils Duquet: *“The geopolitical situation today is completely different from a few years ago and very explosive. A robust control agency and a new comprehensive government policy that defines the playing field for companies and research institutions remain more necessary than ever. Rather than focusing solely on the big principles, we need to involve companies and research institutions in a concrete step-by-step plan that allows them to find the difficult balance between acting carefully and seizing opportunities. In the short term, this may cause friction, but in the long term, it is the only way to achieve legal certainty for companies and research institutions.”*



The contribution of the Peace Institute, weighed and considered

Florence Foster, Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights

“The publication on human rights and due diligence helps to bridge the gap between abstract international standards, such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the daily practice of defence companies and regulators.

The document clarifies whether and how defence companies can influence customers and partners when the end use of products entails serious human rights risks. It also provides clarity on the responsibilities of states and companies when arms exports are legally permitted but may have harmful consequences. Finally, it shows how due diligence should be tailored to the specific risks of the defence chain.

In my research, I regularly refer to it as the most recent document that clearly explains how risks can be identified, mitigated and influenced by companies, governments and civil society organisations. The sector-specific examples make these concepts concrete.”

In October 2025, the Flemish Peace Institute published three new practical guides

Polarisation: towards shock-resistant schools

For and by teachers

Schools are mirrors of society. Issues that lead to discussion or tension in wider society can also cause unrest in classrooms and schools. After all, pupils regularly make confrontational and polarising, sometimes even extreme, statements.



Maarten Van Alstein, researcher at the Flemish Peace

Institute: *“When controversial topics are discussed in class, heated discussions can arise, sometimes even bitter conflicts. In line with tensions in the outside world, the differences between groups of pupils can also increase at school, with mistrust and hostility systematically increasing.”*

In three new practical guides, the Flemish Peace Institute provides educational professionals with tools for dealing with social conflict and polarisation. In addition to offering concrete techniques and strategies that teachers can use when discussions become explosive in the classroom, we point out the importance of being proactive. This means fostering an open classroom climate and a school-wide approach in which the entire team works to create an environment in which boundaries are set and at the same time there is room for different views. These insights are, naturally, based on the latest scientific research. But they are also supported by expertise from the field.

Maarten Van Alstein: *“In recent years, we have given workshops and lectures for teachers, often several times a week. We learned what teachers struggle with, but, at the same time, these moments offered wonderful opportunities to learn from the teachers themselves: their expertise is indispensable to our research. The practical wisdom of mediators, dialogue trainers and other educational professionals was also essential to these practical guides.”*

Friction and violence at school... and beyond

The demand for workshops, lectures and exchanges of ideas about conflict and polarisation in the classroom remains enormous. The Peace Institute's approach is always to help teachers and educational professionals to deal with controversial and polarising



issues in a de-escalating and constructive manner. Our goal is to do this without them – or us as researchers – becoming the subject of controversy in turn or further fuelling harmful polarisation.

Nils Duquet: *“Evolution, gender, migration, historical themes such as the Crusades or slavery, elections, and the wars in Israel and Palestine and in Ukraine... Teachers often have no choice but to deal with these issues. In the coming years, we will therefore continue to support teachers: with research and publications, but also with more interactive programmes such as our Nobel Prize programme and teaching materials such as EDUbox War and Peace, which we developed in collaboration with VRT.”*

Of course, the Flemish Peace Institute is not starting from scratch. Over the past decade, we, along with many other organisations, researchers, schools and teachers, have built up expertise on polarisation, often on our own but also within the Wij-Zij network, for example. That network – with partners from local government, civil society, research, youth work and education – finished at the end of September 2025. Several educational partners who were involved indicated that they wanted to continue consulting with each other. The Peace Institute will facilitate and coordinate these consultations in the coming years. These discussions do not have to be limited to classroom interactions between teachers and pupils.

Nils Duquet: *“Schools and student support centres are increasingly confronted with various phenomena relating to violence, including criminal violence, violent radicalisation and fights. For this reason, in the coming years, the Peace Institute will explicitly focus a channel of its research on violence among young people and effective strategies for violence prevention. To this end, we will build on previous research into violent youth groups, drug-related violence in Belgium and the prevention of violent radicalisation.”*

The contribution of the Peace Institute, weighed and considered Jurgen Viaene, educational counsellor at Catholic Education Flanders

“The three practical guides offer very concrete tools that we provide to schools as an educational support service. They were distributed via our newsletter and complement our own professional development programme.

The guides offer a hands-on and evidence-based answer to questions about conflict, diversity of opinion, sensitive issues and polarisation at school. They are useful both for teachers in the classroom and for school teams who want to become more skilled in this area.”

In February 2025, the Flemish Peace Institute organised a conference featuring new research

Learning from histories of war and violence

Changing Democracies: an ambitious European project

Changing Democracies started with a consortium of partners in various countries who collected testimonies from people who had experienced a transition from dictatorship to democracy and a free market. This took place within a project of the Evens Foundation funded by the European Commission. The Flemish Peace Institute, responsible for the research effort linked to the project, coordinated research into how pupils in six European countries dealt with these testimonies. In Flanders, we conducted research in two secondary schools in Antwerp and in a teacher training college, among other places.

Maarten Van Alstein, researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute: *“In history education, we try to give pupils knowledge and insights about the past. In short, as a society, we want them to learn about history. When it comes to histories of violence, war and dictatorship, however, it appears that we often want something more: we also want them to learn from the violent past – for democratic citizenship or for peace. However, this is a complex issue. Historians warn of all kinds of pitfalls: history can be misused, including for political purposes or to moralise. In this study, we wanted to find out how young people experience projects in which they make connections between the past and the present.”*

An important finding is that the students not only acquired knowledge about the history of dictatorship and democracy in Europe but also developed insights into the current relevance of that history and sharpened their critical thinking.

Maarten Van Alstein: *“A remarkable point was that a group of students in teacher training indicated that they wanted to teach about democracy and dictatorship in a neutral way. This observation gave us pause. It deserves serious reflection and further research.”*



Local friction... and peace

If neutrality about how society is shaped – rather than an attachment to the constitution and to a democratic way of living and deciding together – becomes a basic attitude for some teachers in education, it is important to be alert.

Nils Duquet: *“This is precisely why it remains as important as ever to consider the current relevance of history and how historical violence continues to have an impact in the present. Because history often has political or moral connotations, discussions about history can be sensitive or controversial. Our approach is to strengthen teachers and educational staff in their ability to teach about violent history in a scientifically sound, in-depth and multi-voiced way, without stirring up conflict themselves, but using important basic principles of our shared society as a foundation.”*

In order to further inform teaching practice with scientific insight, the Flemish Peace Institute is currently conducting focus groups with pupils, interviews with educational staff in historical museums, and surveys of teachers and pupils. Doing so will enable us to identify potential pitfalls and opportunities. This approach is part of a broader trend in peace research of focusing more on what happens at the local level: how non-violent relationships take shape; how people form an understanding of peace in their family, neighbourhood, school or organisation; and how violence has local roots.

Nils Duquet: *“Actors such as schools and local authorities play a central role in everyday forms of peace and violence prevention. Schools are mini-societies where local peace is negotiated on a daily basis. Local authorities often have the necessary sensitivity to identify worrying developments in good time and respond to them. They also have a broad network of local partners who can promote non-violent relationships, conflict management, and social cohesion between groups and communities. Both schools and local authorities are on the frontline in tackling violent phenomena such as group-related violence and violent radicalisation. It is therefore important for the Peace Institute to continue to provide schools and other local actors with new scientific research in the coming years that will enable them to deal adequately with potential friction.”*



A panel discussion during the closing conference of the Changing Democracies project, on 7 February 2025

The contribution of the Peace Institute, weighed and considered:

Marjolein Delvou, programme curator at the Evens Foundation

“The Changing Democracies research report provided a solid, theoretically grounded starting point and a shared research question within the framework of a transnational project to study how young people in very different national contexts give meaning to personal stories about dictatorship and democracy. At the same time, the various educational practices that were studied also provided insight into the factors that influence this process of meaning-making: the working methods, the way in which the testimonies are presented, the time frame, the local culture of remembrance, the age of the target group, the transnational character of the stories... These are very valuable starting points for us in setting up future projects.”

In July 2025, the Flemish Peace Institute analysed the figures for 2024

Gun violence in Belgium

Figures that give pause for thought

There were 184 firearm incidents in Belgium in 2024, and in 65% of the recorded incidents the firearm was actually fired. These are the findings of an in-depth analysis based on figures from the Gun Violence Incident Monitor (GVIM), an initiative of the Flemish Peace Institute and technology company Textgain at the request of the European Commission. In 2024 in Belgium, firearm violence claimed at least 21 lives and injured 80 people. The hotspot for all this violence was Brussels.



Astrid De Schutter, researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute: “In 2024, Brussels saw at least 13 fatalities and at least 44 injuries from firearm violence. According to the latest available figures from Statbel on causes of death in Belgium, the number of deaths from gun violence in Brussels fluctuated between none and four from 2017 to 2022. We can only describe such an increase in just two years as very disturbing.”

Belgium has long been known as a country of weapons. However, in Brussels, weapons and drug trafficking have created a lethal cocktail in recent years.

Astrid De Schutter: “In Brussels, members of one drug gang shoot at members of another gang. The people who are used by the drug world are often very young and therefore more impulsive. They do not shy away from shooting in public. This increases the risk of there being innocent victims.”

From friction over symptom management to a focus on prevention

With large-scale initiatives and operational improvements (such as connecting automatic number-plate recognition cameras to a single digital platform), the judiciary and police are doing their utmost to avoid there being further innocent victims and prevent further escalation. The impact on the ground may be significant. Nevertheless, we already know that real solutions must be sought elsewhere.

Nils Duquet: *“An important avenue for our policy-makers to explore is that of general prevention. To put it bluntly, those who are sitting in school are not sitting on a bench in one of Brussels’ many squares, ready to fire at anyone who threatens their territory. We absolutely must keep young people out of the clutches of recruiters. This was true after the terrorist attacks of 2016 for those who were attracted to radical ideas. Today, it is at least as true for those who find it difficult to resist the lure of quick (drug) money. The keyword, especially for young people, is ‘perspective’: a decent place to live, safety, an education and a job.”*

An analysis of youth violence by the Peace Institute has already shown that local police zones in Flanders are also seeing an increase in the possession and use of bladed weapons. Illegal possession of weapons and weapon violence are therefore major challenges for local authorities, police services and prevention workers.

Nils Duquet: *“In recent years, the Peace Institute has focused primarily on trafficking in and violence involving firearms. However, simultaneously, there has been a clear trend towards youth violence becoming more serious, with younger perpetrators: incidents are becoming increasingly severe, often involving the use of bladed weapons. In the Coalition Agreement, the Flemish Government emphasises the importance of a targeted strategy for young people and violence, including by employing an integrated approach to youth crime and by anchoring a multidisciplinary whole-of-chain approach locally. In the coming years, the institute will therefore broaden its focus in order to contribute to this policy discussion. Broad violence prevention remains an important guiding principle in this regard.”*



The contribution of the Flemish Peace Institute, weighed and considered:

Richard Martens, National Coordinator Illegal Firearms, Dutch Police

“This publication reminds me once again of the importance of paying attention to the availability of firearms. ‘No gun, no crime’ is a well-known saying in the United Kingdom. In order to carry out successful interventions, it is crucial that we understand the various aspects of firearm violence. The data generated by the Gun Violence Incident Monitor are an important tool in this regard. I will also continue to strive to ensure that, in time, we can link this data to police data. By ‘enriching’ this data, we will be able to more quickly gain an insight into the nature of this crime.

The publication also makes it clear that interventions must take place on various fronts. Preventive interventions include youth care, information provision, education, and the anonymous reporting of firearm possession and misuse. In the case of repressive intervention, it is important to carry out thorough analyses that can help the police to choose the right intervention method. The ultimate goal is to work towards a safer society. Because firearm crime has no place in our society.”

PUBLICATIONS AND ADVISORY NOTES FROM THE FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE

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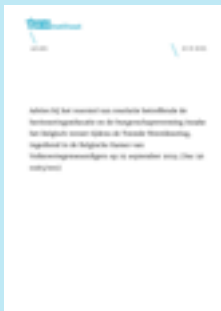


17/01/2f025

Human rights due diligence in the global defence industry: lessons from other sectors - more information on page 23

Boris Verbrugge, Didier Verbruggen and Hans Merket

In this report, we examine how companies in three sectors (technology, diamonds and non-energy mineral extraction) deal with challenges in the context of due diligence. We draw lessons from these sectors for the defence industry.



21/01/2025

Advisory note on the draft resolution on remembrance education and citizenship education concerning Belgian resistance during the Second World War

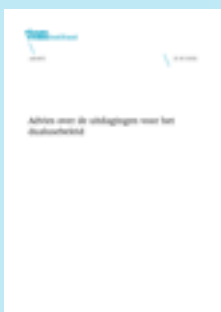
In response to a question from the Federal Parlement Defence Committee, the Flemish Peace Institute formulated an advisory note on the draft resolution on remembrance education and citizenship education concerning Belgian resistance during the Second World War.



22/01/2025

Advisory note on the draft resolution “on strengthening inter-federal cooperation on security and defence in defence innovation and the defence industry”

This advisory note was formulated at the request of the Federal Parlement Defence Committee.



03/02/2025

Advisory note on the challenges of dual-use policy

In a new advisory note on the challenges of dual-use policy, the Flemish Peace Institute lists urgent and concrete measures to better cover the risks, including in the fields of export control and security. Not only must the role of the government change but also companies and knowledge institutions must take on greater responsibility.



03/02/2025

Innovation & dual-use in the eye of the storm: on strategic autonomy, peace and security

John Pearson

This report outlines the needs, experiences, requirements and challenges of various Flemish actors involved in dual-use, not only in terms of the control of strategic goods but also in terms of research, innovation and trade in dual-use goods and technologies.



07/02/2025

Changing Democracies: the power of testimonies for democratic education - more information on page 28

Maarten Van Alstein

The question of how we can learn from violent histories cannot simply be dismissed – and rightly so. In this report, we bring together a range of insights and recommendations to avoid potential pitfalls. To this end, we draw on diverse perspectives and personal experiences of people from various countries who have undergone the transition from a non-democratic to a democratic society.



27/02/2025

Flemish radicalisation policy: towards a future-proof action plan - more information on page 12

Annelies Pauwels

Flemish policy on the prevention of radicalisation was developed ten years ago in response to the issue of Syrian fighters. Meanwhile, the threat has changed and now calls for a more structured, sustainable framework rather than a crisis-driven, ad hoc approach. This analysis reflects on the long-term vision of the policy, as laid down in the 2024 decree.



20/03/2025

Funding the arms industry: why financial institutions hold back and how Europe could move forward - more information on page 18

Diederik Cops

In this analysis, we take a close look at the current debates on the defence industry's access to financial markets and the main reasons behind the associated difficulties. We do this by analysing the defence industry policies of 15 major European banks, reviewing the literature and conducting various interviews with key actors.



01/04/2025

Annual report 2024: resilient peace



17/06/2025

Flemish cooperation with Ukraine: building blocks for a shared future

- more information on page 15
Merel Selleslach

This report provides a detailed overview of the support that Flanders has given to Ukraine in recent years. It shows that, with a specific budget and thorough coordination, Flanders can make a difference in the reconstruction of the country. To this end, it is important to focus on and coordinate with the Flemish Eastern Strategy.



17/06/2025

Advisory note on Flemish cooperation with Ukraine

In this publication, the Flemish Peace Institute advises the Flemish Parliament and the Flemish Government to embed the Flemish vision and strategy for the reconstruction of Ukraine in the new Eastern Strategy. This will require a specific earmarked budget. In addition, measures should be taken to swiftly align all Flemish policy areas and departments in their efforts towards the reconstruction of Ukraine.



13/07/2025

Firearm violence in Belgium in 2024 - more information on page 31

Astrid De Schutter

This analysis takes stock of gun violence in 2024 based on figures from the Gun Violence Incident Monitor (GVIM), an initiative of the Flemish Peace Institute and technology company Textgain at the request of the European Commission.



26/09/2025

SIPRI Yearbook 2025: summary in Dutch

The SIPRI Yearbook, published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, is an English-language reference work on global trends in peace and security. We published the official Dutch summary.



03/10/2025

Crisis in the classroom: practical guide for educational professionals on polarisation, conflict and diversity of opinion - more information on page 26

Maarten Van Alstein

This hands-on guide answers the question of how a teacher can defuse an acute conflict or harmful polarisation in the classroom. It is part of a series of three guides (Crisis in the classroom, Controversy on your plate and Constructive disagreement) that support teachers and educational professionals in their approach to conflicts, difficult conversations and polarisation.



03/10/2025

Controversy on your plate: practical guide for educational professionals on polarisation, conflict and diversity of opinion

- more information on page 26

Maarten Van Alstein

This hands-on guide answers the question of how teachers can comfortably teach controversial topics such as war and violence, migration, elections, gender, or even the theory of evolution. It is part of a series of three guides (Crisis in the classroom, Controversy on your plate and Constructive disagreement) that support teachers and educational professionals in their approach to conflicts, difficult conversations and polarisation.



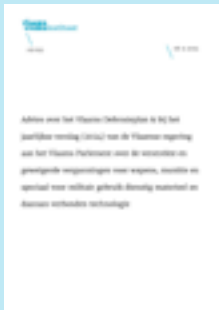
03/10/2025

Constructive disagreement: practical guide for educational professionals on polarisation, conflict and diversity of opinion - more information on page 26

- more information on page 26

Maarten Van Alstein

This hands-on guide answers the question of how a teacher can build a classroom environment in which everyone has a voice without having to raise their voice. It is part of a series of three guides (Crisis in the classroom, Controversy on your plate and Constructive disagreement) that support teachers and educational professionals in their approach to conflicts, difficult conversations and polarisation.



06/11/2025

Advisory note on the Flemish Defence Plan in the annual report (2024) of the Flemish Government to the Flemish Parliament on the issued and refused licences for weapons, ammunition and equipment specifically intended for military use and related technology

In the current geopolitical climate, well-considered investments in the defence sector can contribute to peace, security and strategic autonomy. The Flemish Defence Plan can play a role in this, but the Flemish Peace Institute identifies five crucial conditions in this advisory note.



06/11/2025

Flemish foreign arms trade in 2024: the trade in military equipment from, to and through Flanders

Diederik Cops

Every year, the Flemish Government publishes data on the authorised and refused import, export, transit and transfer of military goods to, from and through the Flemish region. In this analysis, the Flemish Peace Institute draws important conclusions from the data for 2024 about the nature, scope and end use of Flemish authorised and refused dual-use exports in 2024.



06/11/2025

Flemish defence-related sector: evolution, government support and internationalisation since 2021 - more information on page 20

Diederik Cops and Cedric Vandevorde

This analysis examines the sharp rise in defence spending since 2022 and its consequences for the Flemish defence-related industry.



05/12/2025

Dual-use: goods and technologies – Flemish foreign trade & control in 2024

Diederik Cops

Dual-use products and technologies can be used for both civilian and military purposes. This analysis discusses the nature, scope and end use of Flemish licensed and denied dual-use exports in 2024.

EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OUR RESEARCHERS



Our researchers do not limit themselves to our own publications to disseminate their insights. For example, Nils Duquet and Maarten Van Alstein helped to shape VRT EDUbox War and Peace, a collaboration between VRT, the Flemish Peace Institute, the Red Cross Flanders, the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, the BELvue Museum and De Aanstokerij.

EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS BY OUR RESEARCHERS

Duquet, N. & Van Alstein, M. (2025), Striving for peace, despite everything, **SAMPOL**, 14 February 2025.

Cops, D., Verbrugge, B., Verbruggen, D. & Merket, H. (2025), Human rights due diligence in the global defence industry: lessons from other sectors, WorldECR: **The Journal of Export Controls and Sanctions**, April 2025.

Duquet, N. & Van Alstein, M. (2025), The EU must now prove its Nobel Peace Prize, **De Gids op Maatschappelijk Gebied**, April 2025.

Van Alstein, M. (2025), The lure of violence, **Streven Vrijplaats**, April 2025.

Duquet, N. (2025), The insidious logic of an arms race, **mo.be**, 4 May 2025.

Duquet, N. & Cops, D. (2025), More than a strong army: how can we make European peace resilient? **SAMPOL**, 1 August 2025.

Duquet, N. (2025), A Flemish umbrella against a bleak geopolitical storm, **Knack.be**, 21 September 2025.

De Schutter, A. (2025), Bull's eye? An analysis of firearm violence in Belgium, **Verdieping: Bewaken en Beveiligen**, October 2025

Van Alstein, M. (2025), Polarisation/connection: comments on a popular pair of concepts, **Streven Vrijplaats**, 8 October 2025.

Pauwels, A. & Duquet, N. (2025), Firearms, conflict, and terrorism: a violent nexus, in: Bright, D. (ed.), Illicit firearms markets and organised crime, Oxford: **Oxford University Press**, pp. 274–297.

Van Alstei, M. (2025), Words of memory: Oludah Equiano, **Getuigen Tussen Geschiedenis en Herinnering**, no. 140.

Van Alstein, M. (2025), Words of memory: Simone Weil, **Getuigen Tussen Geschiedenis en Herinnering**, no. 140.

INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

PRESENTATIONS IN THE FLEMISH PARLIAMENT

04/02/2025

- **Presentation of the research and recommendations on challenges for dual-use policy**, in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Flemish Parliament (by Nils Duquet).

20/05/2025

- **Presentation of the 2024 annual report of the Flemish Peace Institute**, in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Flemish Parliament (by Nils Duquet).

17/06/2025

- **Presentation of research and recommendations on Flemish cooperation with Ukraine**, in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Flemish Parliament (by Merel Selleslach and Nils Duquet).

09/12/2025

- **Presentation of recommendations on the Flemish Government's 2024 annual report on the arms trade to the Flemish Parliament**, in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Flemish Parliament (by Diederik Cops and Nils Duquet).

OWN EVENTS

20/01/2025

- **Webinar – Due diligence in the global defence industry: lessons from other sectors**, a presentation of our own published report, in collaboration with the International Peace Information Service and KU Leuven – HIVA, on due diligence in the defence industry and relevant lessons from other sectors (with Diederik Cops).

07/02/2025

- **Conference – Changing Democracies: the power of testimonies for democratic education**, presentation of the results of the scientific component and the educational materials of this European project on promoting intergenerational, critical dialogues on dictatorship and democracy today, in the De Schelp hall in the Flemish Parliament.

20/03/2025

- **Conference – Investing in defence: what choices is Flanders making?** a discussion with members of parliament, political staff, representatives of relevant government departments, researchers, the defence-related industry and civil society actors in the De Schelp hall in the Flemish Parliament.

01/04/2025

- **Presentation – 2024 annual report: resilient peace**, an event on the occasion of the presentation of the 2024 annual report of the Flemish Peace Institute, in the De Schelp hall in the Flemish Parliament.

08/05/2025

- **Conference – Reimagining Peace: PEACE 2025**, presentation of the PEACE Research Community Europe, an initiative supported by COST Association – European Cooperation in Science and Technology and funded by the European Union, in the Flemish Parliament.

13/06/2025

- **Conference – COARM-NGO Forum 2025: EU arms export control in a changing world**, annually organised by Saferworld and this year co-organised by the Flemish Peace Institute, featuring a discussion of current issues relating to the export of conventional arms, in the De Schelp hall in the Flemish Parliament (with Diederik Cops).

25/09/2025

- **Day of Peace 2025 – Documentary screening and panel discussion**, with a screening of the documentary “Vermist en Gevonden” (Missing and Found) and conversations on how to deal with the excavated remains of First World War soldiers, in the De Schelp hall in the Flemish Parliament (discussion partners: Wouter Sinaeve, In Flanders Fields Museum; Gilles Bultinck, Member of the Flemish Parliament; Prof. Heleen Touquet, University of Antwerp; and Maarten Van Alstein).

06/11/2025

- **Roundtable discussion – Forgotten citizens of Ukraine: how Flanders and Belgium can help**, organised by the Flemish Peace Institute in collaboration with PR Army, with testimony from former civilian hostage Olena Yahupova, in the Flemish Parliament (with Merel Selleslach).

10/11/2025

- **11 November Lecture 2025 - Unjust peace, by philosopher and writer Alicja Gescinska**, with musical accompaniment by the Belgian-Syrian oud player Elias Bachoura, in collaboration with Ypres City of Peace and the In Flanders Fields Museum.

EXTERNAL PUBLIC OUTREACH

17/01/2025

- **Lecture – Can you learn from violent history?** during a study day on history and citizenship organised by GO! Athena Oostende (with Maarten Van Alstein).

20/01/2025

- **Presentation – Illegal firearms markets in Europe**, at the conference The Current State and Future of Europe’s Illicit Arms Economy, in Brussels (with Nils Duquet).

24/01/2025

- **Workshop – Youth violence in public spaces: How do we defuse the debate?** together with Hanne Verledens and Maarten François from the City of Kortrijk, at Frictiefest (with Annelies Pauwels).

11/02/2025

- **Guest lecture – Arms trade and violent conflict**, in the programme “Transnational organised crime and conflict” at VU Amsterdam (with Nils Duquet).

20/02/2025

- **Lecture – Can you learn from violent history?** during a training day for history teachers of Catholic Education Flanders in Leuven (with Maarten Van Alstein).

25/02/2025

- **Online presentation – Violent right-wing extremism in Europe: trends & policy**, during the webinar “Right-wing extremism and restorative justice”, organised by KU Leuven, VU Amsterdam and the European Forum for Restorative Justice (with Annelies Pauwels).

27/02/2025

- **Guest lecture – Building blocks for peace: what Flanders can do for Ukraine**, for Dutch language and literature students at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest (with Merel Selleslach and Nils Duquet).

27/02/2025

- **Guest lecture – Conflict, polarisation and peace**, for orthopedagogy students at UC Leuven-Limburg in Hasselt (with Maarten Van Alstein).

28/02/2025

- **Presentation – Ask Olg-A: Online Violence Prevention Assistance Kit**, at the working group on radicalisation of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (with Annelies Pauwels).

05/03/2025

- **Panel discussion – Small states, big impact**, organised by Academi Heddwch Cymru, the Wales peace institute (with Merel Selleslach).

12/03/2025

- **Panel discussion – War and liberation**, during the Humanities Forum Day at Ghent University (with Maarten Van Alstein).

13/03/2025

- **Guest lecture – Can you learn from violent history?** in the history teacher training programme at Ghent University (with Maarten Van Alstein).

14/03/2025

- **Workshop – Dealing with controversy and polarisation in the classroom**, in collaboration with Prof. Jelle De Schrijver at the Centre for In-Service Training in Education, University of Antwerp (with Maarten Van Alstein).

20/03/2025

- **Presentation – The Nobel Prize project of the Flemish Peace Institute**, during the teachers’ event Teachup! 2025, organised by Enabel (with Merel Selleslach and Maarten Van Alstein).

24/03/2025

- **Lecture – Conflict and polarisation**, during a focus session of the Agency for Civic and Social Integration, in Brussels (with Maarten Van Alstein).

26/03/2025

- **Panel discussion – European debate: one army for Europe?** organised by Minos Leuven and Europa Direct Vlaams-Brabant, Provincial House Leuven (with Diederik Cops).

02/04/2025

- **Guest lecture – Can you learn from violent history?** in the History and Philosophy teacher training programme at the University of Antwerp (with Maarten Van Alstein).

04/04/2025

- **Lecture – Changing Democracies**, in collaboration with Marjolein Delvou and Hanna Zielinska, during the EuroClio Annual Conference, in Bratislava (with Maarten Van Alstein).

07/04/2025

- **Presentation – VISTA: violence with firearms – incidents, seizures and trafficking of arms**, during the EMPACT meeting FORTIFY in Madrid (with Astrid De Schutter).

09/04/2025

- **Presentation – Trends in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Europe and challenges for their control**, for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Vienna (with Nils Duquet).

11/04/2025

- **Panel discussion – Studying peace and conflict in Europe in the new Trump era**, presentation of PEACE Action at the annual conference of the Peace Research Center Prague at Charles University in Prague (with Merel Selleslach & Nils Duquet).

15/04/2025

- **Hybrid lecture – Diversion of conventional weapons**, during the regional meeting of the Young Women and Next Generation Initiative and the Mentor-Alumni programme of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium, in the Flemish Parliament (with Nils Duquet).

22/04/2025

- **Presentation – Ask Olg-A: online violence prevention assistance toolkit**, for the Flemish Platform on Radicalisation (with Annelies Pauwels).

29/04/2025

- **Online workshop – Ask Olg-A: online violence prevention assistance toolkit**, during the online networking event “Bandbreedte”, organised by the Flemish agency Opgroeien (with Annelies Pauwels).

30/04/2025

- **Lecture – (Geo)politics impacting export controls and sanction implementing measuresq**, during the Deloitte seminar “Sanctions and Export Controls: Challenges and Solutions for Global Businesses” (with Diederik Cops).

07/05/2025

- **Lecture – How to build local government in times of peace and how to communicate in times of crisis**, during an internal training course organised by the City of Genk (with Annelies Pauwels).

15/05/2025

- **Guest lecture – Innovation, technology development and European cooperation: implications and challenges for export and export controls**, as part of the course “Technology, Science and International Security” at the University of Antwerp (with Diederik Cops).

15/05/2025

- **Guest lecture – International arms trade and the organisation of arms export controls**, as part of the course “Non-proliferation and Arms Control” at the University of Antwerp (with Diederik Cops).

17/05/2025

- **Keynote – “War as a moral compass?” On myth, criticism and the necessity to act**, during the Oud-Studenten Geschiedenis Gent networking day “80 Years Since the Second World War”, in Ghent (with Maarten Van Alstein).

22/05/2025

- **Keynote – Peace is a myth**, during the UNESCO Flanders meeting day in Brussels (with Maarten Van Alstein).

03/06/2025

- **Webinar – Launch of the PEACE initiative**, organised by the European Peace Research Association (with Nils Duquet).

04/06/2025

- **Debate – Investments in the defence sector and sustainable investing**, at a thematic event organised by Towards Sustainability in Brussels (with Diederik Cops).

05/06/2025

- **Lecture – Polarisation, populism and violence**, during the Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies public forum “Democratic Challenges in Practice”, at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Université Libre de Bruxelles (with Maarten Van Alstein).

12/06/2025

- **Lecture – Living together in turbulent times**, during the Open Forum of Beweging.net in Genk (with Maarten Van Alstein).

24/06/2025

- **Presentation – Sustainable financing**, in a working group organised by Bond Beter Leefmilieu (with Diederik Cops).

24/06/2025

- **Presentation – European firearms legislation**, at the invitation of the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance for members of the Ukrainian Parliament, in Geneva (with Nils Duquet).

26/06/2025

- **Presentation – Research and advice on Flemish cooperation with Ukraine**, to the Strategic Consultation on International Affairs of the Flemish Government (with Nils Duquet and Merel Selleslach).

27/08/2025

- **Presentation – COST Action PEACE**, a European network of peace researchers, at the 18th Pan-European Conference on International Relations, organised by the European International Studies Association, in Bologna (with Nils Duquet).

28/08/2025

- **Lecture – Commemoration**, during a commemorative walk in Zurenborg (with Maarten Van Alstein).

03/09/2025

- **Presentation – Cooperation with Ukraine: building blocks for a shared future – a Flemish perspective**, at the 34th Karpacz Economic Forum (with Merel Selleslach).

04/09/2025

- **Presentation – Gun violence in Europe: presentation of the results of the Gun Violence Incident Monitor**, at the annual conference (Eurocrim) of the European Society of Criminology, in Athens (with Nils Duquet).

05/09/2025

- **Panel discussion – How can we bridge the gap in Flanders and Brussels between what we know about polarisation and what we do about it?** during the impact day “Polarisation: What Can We Do About It?”, organised by the Wij-Zij network, in Mechelen (with Maarten Van Alstein).

09/09/2025

- **Presentation – Ask Olg-A: online violence prevention assistance toolkit**, at the Flemish Platform on Radicalisation, organised by the Agency for Home Affairs (with Annelies Pauwels and Louise Macours).

10/09/2025

- **Post-screening discussion – Documentary screening of Shadow World and conversation on weapons and peace**, as part of Movie Matters, organised by Dwaalzin, in Brussels (with Nils Duquet).

11/09/2025

- **Presentation – How do we protect young people and adults against organised drug crime?** during the Integrated Safety Networking Event of the City of Genk (with Astrid De Schutter).

12/09/2025

- **Reflection session – Living together in turbulent times**, during a working visit by the City of Amsterdam to the City of Antwerp (with Maarten Van Alstein).

17/09/2025

- **Lecture – Searching for peace**, organised in collaboration with, among others, Amnesty International, Hart Boven Hard and Oxfam, in Geraardsbergen (with Merel Selleslach).

26/09/2025

- **Lecture – Conflict and polarisation**, during the HIVSET study day in Turnhout (with Maarten Van Alstein).

02/10/2025

- **Presentation – European initiatives on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons**, during an expert meeting organised by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (with Nils Duquet).

02/10/2025

- **Lecture – Talking about war and peace**, during the WAT WAT inspiration day in Antwerp (with Maarten Van Alstein).

02/10/2025

- **Presentation – How to strengthen online prevention and early detection of violent radicalisation**, at the Lone Actors and Mental Health working group of the EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation (with Annelies Pauwels).

04/10/2025

- **Lecture – Resilient peace and diplomacy in times of geopolitical uncertainty**, as part of the Athena lectures in Antwerp (with Nils Duquet).

08/10/2025

- **Workshop – Conflict and polarisation in the classroom**, at GO! Atheneum Merelbeke (with Maarten Van Alstein).

10/10/2025

- **Keynote – Dealing with conflict and polarisation**, during a networking day for education partners of Beweging.net in Brussels (with Maarten Van Alstein).

14/10/2025

- **Lecture – Can you learn from violent history?** during the Day for History Teachers West Flanders, Catholic Education Flanders, in Kortrijk (with Maarten Van Alstein).

15/10/2025

- **Presentation – Opening presentation, at the Antwerp Province Security Conference**, this year titled “From Concern to Trust: Young People and Security in Society” (with Annelies Pauwels).

16/10/2025

- **Workshop – Conflicts and polarisation in schools**, in collaboration with Sigrid Raets (Hannah Arendt Institute) within the City of Aalst learning network (with Maarten Van Alstein).

17/10/2025

- **Presentation – Firearm violence in Belgium and Project VISTA**, at the request of the Federal Weapons Service during a meeting of the Interfederal Consultation Committee regarding the fight against illegal arms trafficking, in Brussels (with Nils Duquet).

17/10/2025

- **Lecture – Conflict and polarisation**, for the DocAtlas knowledge centre of Thomas More University College, in Antwerp (with Maarten Van Alstein).

22/10/2025

- **Lecture – The Flemish Peace Institute and resilient peace**, at the Bruges Peace Platform, in Bruges (with Nils Duquet).

22/10/2025

- **Guest lecture – Conflict, polarisation and peace**, for orthopedagogy students at UC Leuven-Limburg in Hasselt (with Maarten Van Alstein).

24/10/2025

- **Panel discussion – UN cinema: screening of The Veto and moderated debate**, organised by Westhoek-Vredeshoek and the United Nations Regional Information Centre, in the Command Bunker Kemmel (with Merel Selleslach).

24/10/2025

- **Workshop – EDUbox War and Peace**, in collaboration with Tine De Blaere (VRT) during the training day “World in Our Hands”, organised by De Aanstokerij (with Maarten Van Alstein).

04/11/2025

- **Presentation – Collaborative capacity-building: what can we do and why should we do it?** at the Wilton Park event “Managing Advanced Conventional Weapons in Eastern Europe” (with Diederik Cops).

06/11/2025

- **Panel discussion – Radicalisation among young people: a storm on the horizon?** at the Hannah Arendt Institute’s Facts to Act Festival (with Annelies Pauwels).

06/11/2025

- **Webinar – PEACE network: connecting science and policy on climate and peace**, coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute and supported by COST Association (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

11/11/2025

- **Lecture – Reflections on peace**, during the war commemoration ceremony of the municipality of Kasterlee (with Maarten Van Alstein).

18/11/2025

- **Guest lecture – Conflict and polarisation**, at Vives University College in Kortrijk (with Maarten Van Alstein).

19/11/2025

- **Guest lecture – Firearms trafficking and violence in Europe**, as part of the course “Introduction to Criminology” at Ghent University (with Nils Duquet).

23/11/2025

- **Panel discussion – Forgotten citizens of Ukraine: how Flanders and Belgium can help**, at Bazaar Mundial, organised by the municipality of Essen (with Merel Selleslach).

24/11/2025

- **Roundtable discussion – Development of UAS and addressing the threat through arms control treaties**, during the 5th Conventional Arms Control Round Table, organised by the German Bundeswehr Verification Centre, Düsseldorf (with Diederik Cops).

26/11/2025

- **Workshop – EDUbox War and Peace**, in collaboration with Tine De Blaere (VRT) during the Culture Days of the Department of Education and Training, De Singel, Antwerp (with Maarten Van Alstein).

02/12/2025

- **Lecture – Conflict and polarisation**, for Hasselt City of Education (with Maarten Van Alstein).

08/12/2025

- **Contribution – From here to gender in the classroom: beyond polarisation**, during the “LIMBORation” of the Catholic University of Leuven (with Maarten Van Alstein).

MEET THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In 2025, the Flemish Peace Institute gained a new Board of Directors, with **Björn Rzoska** as chair. Björn Rzoska said:



“In times like these, when there is a veritable international arms race, it is essential to keep a cool head. The Flemish Peace Institute does this through scientific research, through remembrance education and by fuelling public debate. It is a great honour to be chair of a strong, dynamic team during this pivotal period. Breaking through the current uniformity of thought may feel like cycling into the wind, but it is essential in a democracy today.”

Director **Nils Duquet** is also a member of the Board of Directors.

Below, you can meet the other members and learn about their motivations for becoming involved with the Flemish Peace Institute.

Nominated by the political parties



DENNIS BELS

“As a historian, religious scholar and former teacher, I am very interested in how societies deal with conflict and security. On the Board of Directors, I want to contribute to a balanced debate on peace, focusing on diplomacy and dialogue as well as the resilience of our society. A broad and objective education for young people is crucial in this regard. After all, peace is not a given, but a task: it requires knowledge, nuance and commitment.”



JAN HUIJBRECHTS

“As an author specialising in the Great War and having grown up in the pacifist and anti-militarist tradition of the Flemish movement, getting involved in the Flemish Peace Institute seemed like a great challenge to me.”



WARD KENNES

“The Flemish Peace Institute provides a scientifically based voice for peace. As a member of the board of directors, I want to commit to this now that peace in all its facets is coming under increasing pressure. Because peace is a precious commodity.”



ELKE SLEURS (VICE-CHAIR)

“For 20 years, the Flemish Peace Institute has been a leading organisation in scientific research. The Peace Institute builds expertise in peace and violence prevention with the aim of advising and informing policy-makers and society at large. I am honoured to be part of the Board of Directors as vice-chair and thus to help build and support the many indispensable scientific and public tasks of the Flemish Peace Institute, especially in these particularly turbulent (geopolitical) times.”



TINE SOENS

“During my years in the Flemish Parliament, peace and strict control of the arms trade were the common thread running through my work. As a board member of the Flemish Peace Institute, that mission remains unchanged. Together, we strive for a policy in which human rights always have the highest priority.”



WILFRIED VANDAELE

“As a young man, I became involved in the peace movement, inspired by the idea of ‘never again war’. The horror of what is happening in Ukraine and in Gaza compels us to re-evaluate our pacifism. The scientific approach of the Peace Institute is particularly valuable in this regard.”

Nominated by the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)



JAN BOULOGNE

“It is a special task – especially in these times – to be able to help shape the work of the Peace Institute as a director. The Peace Institute is a powerful collection of knowledge about peace and everything that can threaten and promote it. In these times, it is an indispensable source of knowledge, with a passionate team that is committed to informing society at large.”



HENDRIK CALUWÉ

“Peace can never be taken for granted and is under increasing pressure in the European Union today. Old certainties are no longer sufficient; new ways of thinking are needed. From the Flemish Peace Institute, I want to contribute to future-oriented solutions for Flanders in a safe and peaceful Europe.”



JULIE HENDRICKX DEVOS

“I do not want to stand powerless on the sidelines of history, but actively contribute to building, cherishing and promoting peace. With human rights and international law as our compass, we can give shape to that peace in reality through the Flemish Peace Institute, while at the same time being a voice, a watchful eye and an image maker.”



RIA VAN PEER

“As a child, I was fascinated by war stories, took part in peace marches and worked professionally to promote peaceful dialogue. It is an honour to represent a core social organisation.”

Nominated by the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR)



PROF. DR. BERBER BEVERNAGE

“As a historian researching processes of social recovery in post-conflict situations, I am aware that the memory of violent conflicts can continue to disrupt societies for generations. From that perspective, I am convinced that the Peace Institute’s commitment to resilient peace is not only important for today but also for future generations.”



PROF. DR. ANN PAUWELS

“As an academic, I believe it is important to support the research of the Flemish Peace Institute, especially in these turbulent times.”



PROF. DR. DIRK ROHTUS

“In momentous times like these, the voice of reason must be heard more than ever. And that voice tells us that peace is the most important thing. Striving for diplomacy encourages me to get involved in the Flemish Peace Institute. From Flanders, with an eye on the world.”

Nominated by the Flemish peace movement



HANS LAMMERANT

“The Flemish institutions have the potential to contribute significantly to peace and conflict prevention within their remit, and the Flemish Peace Institute can support this with expert research and advice. Through the Board of Directors, I want to do my bit and represent the voice of the peace movement.”



ORRY VAN DE WAUWER

“As a former member of the Flemish Parliament, I got to know the Flemish Peace Institute as an organisation that does solid work and formulates well-founded advice. Based on my conviction that sustainable peace requires independent analysis, critical reflection and social dialogue, I am now involved as a director, representing the peace movement Pax Christi. After all, the Flemish Peace Institute plays an important role at the intersection of policy, research and public debate on all aspects that contribute to a peace-oriented security policy – both internationally and in our own society.”



NIKO VANDEBOS

“For me as a representative of the peace movement, the themes of the Flemish Peace Institute are very close to my heart. As a starting doctoral researcher, it is also a privilege to get to know the research expertise of the Peace Institute up close!”

Co-opted members



SAARTJE BOUTSEN

“The Peace Institute thoroughly analyses complex peace issues and promotes measures to foster peace and prevent violence, a mission that is more relevant today than ever. The Board of Directors provides a balanced platform for formulating widely supported recommendations, which offers added value in today’s world and to the Flemish Parliament. For this reason, I am committed to serving on the Board of Directors.”



SANDRINE EKOFO

“My experience working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has strengthened my conviction that peace is a policy choice. As a member of the Board of Directors of the Flemish Peace Institute, I want to help build knowledge and policy that focus on conflict prevention, human rights and sustainable peace.”

MEET THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

In 2025, the Flemish Peace Institute also gained a new Scientific Council. This council evaluates the quality of the Peace Institute's research, advises the Board of Directors and the Scientific Secretariat on important trends in peace and security, and can be consulted on ongoing research.

The Scientific Council is composed of the vice-chair of the Board of Directors, the director of the Peace Institute, and eight Belgian and foreign specialists. Below you can read why the eight specialists are keen to contribute to the work of the Flemish Peace Institute.



DR. MARK BROMLEY

Director of Dual-Use and Arms Export Control at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

"I have been a long-term admirer of the Flemish Peace Institute and the way that it combines detailed and varied policy knowledge with a far-reaching and ambitious vision of a more peaceful world. I am very excited and proud to be a member of its Scientific Council and look forward to helping to support its work in the coming years."



DR. GEERT CASTRYCK

Lecturer in History Didactics at the University of Leipzig

"The open exchange of ideas during meetings of the Scientific Council, with both researchers from the institute and other members of the Council, is very inspiring. I am delighted to be able to share my experience in history education and the legacy of past violence, to follow the institute's ongoing research into peace and remembrance education, and to learn from groundbreaking peace research on other themes at the Flemish Peace Institute."



PROF. DR. JOLLE DEMMERS

Professor of Conflict Studies at Utrecht University.

“In these turbulent times we need independent institutions such as the Flemish Peace Institute. As a member of the Scientific Council, I am keen to support the institute to uphold its high standards of evidence-based, independent and critical insight in matters of war and violence, and its vision of how to direct society onto more peaceful pathways.”



DR. NICOLAS FLORQUIN

Senior Researcher and Head of Data and Analysis at the Small Arms Survey

“Joining the Scientific Council is a welcome opportunity to place my work on arms control and armed violence prevention into the broader perspective of peace promotion. I am eager to contribute my data-driven expertise to the Flemish Peace Institute’s mission while fostering deeper collaborations between our research communities. For a practitioner, engaging with the institute helps to bridge the gap between empirical evidence and impactful policies.”



PROF. DR. TIM HAESBROUCK

Professor of International Politics at the Ghent Institute for International and European Studies, Ghent University

“In a context of geopolitical upheaval and social polarisation, high-quality research into peace and security is indispensable. Through sound and independent research, the Flemish Peace Institute contributes to informed public debate and democratic decision-making on peace and security.”



PROF DR. MARIJN HOIJTINK

Professor of International Relations at the University of Antwerp

“I am joining the Scientific Council to contribute to the leading research of the Peace Institute and the importance of scientific research into peace and security issues in general – certainly in light of the changing international security context, rising defence spending and the political considerations that we as a democratic society must face.”



PROF. DR. LETIZIA PAOLI

Full Professor of Criminology at the Faculty of Law, KU Leuven

“I have done my own extensive research into actors and activities of organised crime, the link with terrorism and the associated control policies. I am enthusiastic about the Flemish Peace Institute’s excellent research into arms trading and radicalisation.”



PROF. DR. ISMEE TAMES

Senior Researcher at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam and Professor of War Cultures at Utrecht University

“As a member of the Scientific Council of the Flemish Peace Institute, I can connect and exchange ideas with colleagues on a different level than purely through academic discussions. I hope that my contribution can inspire the Peace Institute in its research work and dialogue with society at large.”

Evaluation report of the Scientific Council 2025

FEBRUARY 2026

GEERT CASTRYCK AND MARCEL MAUSSEN

The Scientific Council assesses the quality of the research conducted by the Flemish Peace Institute and provides the Board of Directors and the Scientific Secretariat with recommendations on relevant developments in peace and security research. In its evaluation of the level of research conducted by the Peace Institute, the Scientific Council mainly looks at the publications produced by the institute itself.

The quality of the research conducted by the Peace Institute is expressed in two ways: the first is scientific quality and the second is a combination of social impact, political resonance and a multiplier effect among professionals. The Scientific Council primarily assesses scientific quality, but it is important to emphasise that the relatively small team within the Scientific Secretariat spends a significant part of its time on impact, resonance and the multiplier effect. As academics, we would like to express our admiration for this work. The many information activities, publications and media appearances are the direct result both of the institute's own research and of expertise-based commentary on current events. Both forms of outreach are made possible by the quality standard that the Scientific Secretariat has built up over the years and renews and maintains year after year.

As in previous years, the Scientific Council structures its assessment of the scientific quality of the research on the basis of the thematic research areas around which the Peace Institute organises its activities.

Weapons, peace and violence

As noted in previous evaluations, the institute has now built up an (international) reputation in the field of research on the possession, use and trade of weapons and weapons technology.

Researcher Diederik Cops played a leading role in the research and publications in this cluster over the past year. March saw the publication of *Funding the arms industry: why financial institutions hold back and how Europe could move forward*, an analysis of the defence industry's access to financial markets. The scientific reviewer stated: "It was very interesting to read and will make a very useful contribution to the debate. I was ini-

tially sceptical about whether it would be possible to approach the subject from the perspective of peace research, but I think it works well with the conclusions and recommendations that are given.”

In addition, Cops wrote *Flemish foreign arms trade in 2024: the trade in military equipment from, to and through Flanders*, which looked at developments concerning the nature, scope and end use of Flemish licensed and refused dual-use exports in 2024 and what these developments could mean for policy and politics. Together with Cedric Vandevoorde, he also wrote *Flemish defence-related sector: evolution, government support and internationalisation since 2021*, which examined the sharp rise in defence spending since 2022 and its consequences for the Flemish defence-related industry. Finally, *Dual-use: goods and technologies – Flemish foreign trade & control in 2024* was published in December.

Astrid De Schutter wrote *Firearm violence in Belgium in 2024*, in which she takes stock of firearm violence based on figures from the Gun Violence Incident Monitor (GVIM), an initiative of the Flemish Peace Institute and technology company Textgain at the request of the European Commission. The Scientific Council is very positive about the way in which the institute contributes to the tools and knowledge needed to keep track of developments both in the production and trade of weapons and in the proliferation and use of firearms. At the European level, the institute plays a leading role in both methodology and coordination in monitoring and reporting on firearm violence.

In the view of the Scientific Council, these publications and recommendations once again demonstrate how the institute succeeds in performing on several fronts simultaneously: through leading scientific research, through thoroughly monitoring new developments in the arms trade and technology, and through advising on legislative and policy choices and processes.

Conflict, peace and society

The analysis *Flemish radicalisation policy: towards a future-proof action plan*, written by Annelies Pauwels, was published at the beginning of the year. It brought together knowledge and insights from many years of research on this theme and translated them into a solid basis from which Flemish policy can draw inspiration. The paper paired the knowledge and insights we had built up ourselves with a thorough analysis of scientific studies on anti-radicalisation policy and of implemented policies (comparing Flemish policy with international policy). This was supplemented with new material based on an expert meeting and numerous targeted discussions. The analysis provides an excellent basis for developing future policy. The Scientific Council reviewer recommended further exploring how the Flemish approach has developed over time in order to arrive at a more dynamic way of dealing with changes in the social and political context.

The Changing Democracies research project, conducted with partners from five European countries, led to the publication of a report by the Peace Institute in 2025, edited by Maarten Van Alstein. Based on concrete testimonies and experiences of radical political and social transitions, the report argues that learning from history should not be based on one-sided, moralising narratives in black-and-white terms of good versus evil.

Van Alstein also wrote three practical guides for educational professionals: *Crisis in the classroom*, *Controversy on your plate* and *Constructive disagreement*. In the reviewer's opinion, the author succeeded in using a wealth of scientifically based knowledge and insights to explain specific issues and offer teachers tools to use in a classroom context. In terms of style and structure (three thematic guides, each featuring "examples", "in-depth analysis" and "tips & tricks"), these documents are well suited to their practical purpose. The whole is very thoroughly substantiated and argued. Social issues and tensions will undoubtedly continue to be significant for classroom interactions and specific teaching situations. The interaction between the real and online worlds and what happens at home and at school remains a challenge for teachers, parents, educational institutions and society as a whole, but certainly also and even primarily for pupils. It is therefore highly commendable that the Peace Institute has built up considerable expertise in this area and is translating this research-based expertise into practice.

The Scientific Council is also positive about the way in which the expertise built up by Maarten Van Alstein and Annelies Pauwels on youth violence, violent extremism, online violence prevention, dealing with a history of violence, dealing with controversy and polarisation in the classroom, and the meaning of peace has been used in various ways for activities in schools, teacher training programmes and civil society organisations. It demonstrates that the Peace Institute actively disseminates its research and findings to the relevant target groups.

Peace-oriented foreign policy

June 2025 saw the simultaneous publication of a research report titled *Flemish cooperation with Ukraine: building blocks for a shared future*, written by Merel Selleslach, and an *Advisory note on Flemish cooperation with Ukraine*, adopted by the Board of Directors. The report provided an overview of the various forms of (financial and other) support that Flanders has provided to Ukraine in recent years. The reviewer stated that "the very extensive, relevant and insightful field research conducted in the form of interviews and focus groups" had resulted in a relevant and original contribution to an urgent social and political debate in Flanders. It is striking how prominently the welfare of Ukrainian refugees features in Flemish public and political debate., as well as how much the provision of aid (including for reconstruction) is linked to the broader objectives of Flemish foreign and security policy. The reviewer also pointed out the tension between state-of-the-art scientific relevance and political application. The research conducted is of excellent quality, capable of providing well-founded advice to the Flemish

Government. Additionally, with relatively little extra effort, the research could be developed into an original contribution to ongoing scientific research on the reconstruction of Ukraine.

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Finally, the Scientific Council wishes to emphasise its appreciation for the input and contributions of the director and the scientific staff of the institute to the public debate, to scientific conferences and panels, and to various workshops with professionals, politicians and policy-makers. The activities in 2025 make clear that the institute not only takes a proactive approach to organising conferences and panels, sometimes around recurring events such as Peace Day and the 11 November lecture, but that it also participates in numerous external activities. As mentioned at the beginning of this evaluation, the Scientific Council particularly appreciates the numerous opportunities for knowledge transfer and sharing with professionals (such as teachers, policy-makers, administrators and practitioners in various fields) as well as the initiatives in which these activities explicitly focus on young people and students.

The Flemish Peace Institute's initiative to strengthen peace research at European level deserves a special mention. The European Cooperation in Science and Technology action plan Peace Research Community Europe, which was launched in 2025, brings a fresh dynamic to European peace research that is vitally important in today's world, where some use "peace" as a weapon. The Flemish Peace Institute strikes an impressive balance between avoiding the role of an activist and yet, based on scientific expertise, having the greatest possible impact.

In conclusion, in the view of the Scientific Council, the research carried out by the Scientific Secretariat of the Flemish Peace Institute in 2025 was relevant, innovative, varied and of excellent quality.

Director

Nils Duquet

Researchers

Diederik Cops

Astrid De Schutter

Annelies Pauwels

Merel Selleslach

Maarten Van Alstein

Research assistant

Louise Macours (since July 2025)

Communications manager

Wouter Claes

Office manager

Margarida Ferro

Interns

Andres López Estapé

Lukas Roelens

Kaji Suleman

Cedric Vandevoorde

Ellen Willio

Visiting scholars

Killian Wirthwein Vega

Charles Oscar Warner III



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The Flemish Peace Institute is an independent institute
for peace research at the Flemish Parliament