

### 3 The Establishment of an Independent Belgium

The United Kingdom of the Netherlands had established itself as a new country in 1815. At the Congress of Vienna, Great Britain promoted the creation of a buffer state between France and Prussia.<sup>1</sup> Unifying the Netherlands and Belgium was the ideal solution. As Castlereagh said to the Belgians during the Congress of Vienna: "In order to be free, you must be strong. In order to be strong, you must be part of a larger system. That system shall be union with Holland."<sup>2</sup> Britain's main intention in 1814 was to create an effective barrier against France. The new kingdom was to be strong enough to resist aggression from Paris. Thus, the permanent union of this territory represented the cornerstone of British diplomacy. This political doctrine lasted until Palmerston became Foreign Secretary.<sup>3</sup>

The causes of the Belgian Revolution of 1830 can be found in the origins of the emerging union of the two states.<sup>4</sup> Prince William of the House of Orange-Nassau was the head of the union, ruling as William I. European historiography often differs in perspective on the first and only King of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup> In his uncompromising pursuit of policies, he often acted like a typical absolutist monarch, disregarding his subjects' social and political appeals.<sup>6</sup>

The new state's constitution involved the establishment of the States General, which comprised two chambers. The first chamber consisted of representatives appointed by the king with a life mandate. Members of regional states were elected to the second chamber. The main problem here was the division of seats, with two and a half million Dutch having the same number of seats as three and a half million Belgians. Another contentious issue was the division of the national debt on a one-to-one basis because the Dutch debt was 12 times higher than the Belgian debt before 1815. William I could only push through the adoption of the constitution through vote manipulation and the violation of voting rights.<sup>7</sup> A backlash arose against the King's actions, mainly from Belgian city dwellers and members of the Church. Catholic priests refused to give communion to officials who agreed with the new constitution. Another demand was unlimited control of

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<sup>1</sup> NICOLSON, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> HULICIUS, Eduard, *Belgie*, Prague 2006, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> CHURCH, Clive, *Europe in 1830. Revolution and Political Change*, London 1983, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup> VANDERBOSCH, Amry, *Dutch Foreign Policy Since 1815. A Study in Small Power Politics*, The Hague 1959, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> SCHROEDER, Paul W., *The Transformation of European Politics 1763–1848*, Oxford 1994, p. 671.

<sup>6</sup> CHAMBERLAIN, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> The Belgians rejected the draft constitution at 796 to 527 votes.

the Belgian education system.<sup>8</sup> In response, the King reduced the number of Church schools in 1824. Tensions between the King and the government, on the one hand, and the Belgian clergy, on the other, persisted throughout the union's existence.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the Dutch advantage in the States General, they also had more people in the state administration, diplomatic service, and army.<sup>10</sup> Dutch was to be the only official language of the new union.<sup>11</sup> William's measures united Belgian opposition groupings into a shared camp. The objective of the union of liberals and conservatives represented by the clergy was the abolition of censorship, equal rights for Belgians, and the adoption of liberal reforms. The united movement was set up in 1828 and was named Unionism.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the dissatisfaction of the Belgians with their disadvantageous status within the shared state, the great crop failure of 1829–1830 caused by severe frost also played a role in the start of the uprising. A lack of food manifested in the growing radicalisation of the population. However, the immediate trigger for the revolt was the July Revolution. When civil servants travelled to Brussels in August 1830 for William I's birthday celebrations, they saw posters on the walls stating: "Monday: Fireworks. Tuesday: Illuminations. Wednesday: Revolution."<sup>13</sup> A day later, the Belgians took to the streets and began the revolution to liberate themselves from Dutch rule. Although initially it was a rebellion mainly of the working class, the revolutionary movement progressively spread throughout Belgian society.<sup>14</sup> The Belgians' primary goal was administrative autonomy, but the insurmountable differences between the two nations meant they eventually needed their own state.<sup>15</sup>

In Great Britain, the events in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands were taken relatively calmly. Wellington's cabinet did not hide its sympathy for William I and trusted that the situation would soon settle down for him. Metternich was naturally on the side of the Dutch. For him, it was a rebellion against the

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<sup>8</sup> SCHROEDER, Paul, *Systems, Stability, Statecraft*, New York 2004, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> ARBLASTER, Paul, *A History of Low Countries*, Hounds-mills 2006, p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> DEMOULIN, Robert, *Guillame Ier et la transformation économique des Provinces Belges*, Liege 1938, p. 358.

<sup>11</sup> CRAIG, Gordon Alexander, *Geschichte Europas 1815–1980. Vom Wiener Kongreß bis zur Gegenwart*, München 1995, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> HULICIUS, p. 125.

<sup>13</sup> ŠUSTA, Josef, *Dějiny Evropy v letech 1812–1870*, vol. I, Prague 1922, p. 221.

<sup>14</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 27 December 1830, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 190.

<sup>15</sup> SCHROEDER, *The Transformation*, p. 672.

legitimate ruler and a disturbance to the prevailing international order.<sup>16</sup> London and Vienna turned their gaze uneasily to France.<sup>17</sup> France perceived the events in their neighbouring country as the first step towards destroying the European system of 1815.<sup>18</sup> The collapse of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands would mean the breach of the buffer zone around France and a significant tear in the post-Napoleonic international system.<sup>19</sup>

Another player whose situation was directly affected was Prussia. Fearing the discontent might spread to his land, King Frederick William III moved his troops to the border with Belgium. William I even asked the Prussian King for military help, but Frederick William III waited for London to grant its approval.<sup>20</sup> Fear of Prussian intervention aroused a response in Paris.<sup>21</sup> French Foreign Minister Louis-Mathieu Molé cited the non-intervention policy.<sup>22</sup> The proclamation of this principle, in fact, meant the French would retaliate in the event of Prussian intervention in favour of William I.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Great Britain would have the final word, mainly because the rest of the Great Powers, namely Russia and Austria, had no direct ambitions regarding the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, and their roles in this case were limited.<sup>24</sup> Over this entire period, Metternich exploited the Belgian Question to put pressure on Great Britain to pursue its policy in the Papal States, which will be examined in Chapter 5, *“Crisis on the Italian Peninsula and the Final Split.”* By contrast, Russia was fully committed to suppressing the uprising in Congress Poland from December 1830. Although Nicholas's animosity towards the Orléans regime continued to grow, without Prussian support, he had limited options, and essentially none following the outbreak of the November Uprising.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 26 October 1830 (second dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 190.

<sup>17</sup> VANDERBOSCH, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 26 October 1830 (first dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 190.

<sup>19</sup> PRICE, Munro, *The Perilous Crown. France Between Revolutions 1814–1848*, Oxford 2007, p. 215.

<sup>20</sup> SETON-WATSON, Robert William, *Britain in Europe 1789–1914*, Cambridge 1937, p. 156.

<sup>21</sup> PINKNEY, David, *The French Revolution of 1830*, Princeton 1972, p. 334.

<sup>22</sup> RENDALL, Matthew, *A Qualified Success for Collective Security: The Concert of Europe and the Belgian Crisis 1831*. In: Diplomacy and Statecraft 18, 2007, p. 275.

<sup>23</sup> MOWAT, Robert, *A History of European Diplomacy 1815–1914*, New York 1931, p. 71.

<sup>24</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> Memorandum Upon the Proposed Conference Upon the Affairs of Belgium, WELLINGTON, vol. VII, p. 385.

Meanwhile, the situation in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands advanced rapidly. By 27 October 1830, the Belgians controlled all of Belgium except for the fortresses of Maastricht, Luxembourg, and Antwerp.<sup>26</sup> Displeased with the situation, William I called for the Powers to intervene in his favour. Yet, none of the Powers dared to act, and together, they rejected the option. Instead, they agreed upon a diplomatic solution. The outcome was the convening of an international conference in London.<sup>27</sup> As in the case of the July Revolution, Nicholas I aimed for a diplomatic meeting in London. Metternich welcomed his proposal, but he continued to believe that Vienna should be the venue. Over time, the Austrian Chancellor's opinion on the conference changed.<sup>28</sup> He did not understand the objective of the London discussions: whether it was to legitimise a policy of intervention, act as a mediator between two parties in conflict, or perhaps withdraw from the position of arbitrator.<sup>29</sup>

Palmerston, as a representative of the organising state, chaired the conference. Regarding the other participants, Russia sent its representatives to London, including Ambassador Khristofor Andreyevich von Lieven and Ambassador Plenipotentiary Adam Matuszewicz.<sup>30</sup> Heinrich von Bülow represented Prussia, while Johann von Wessenberg and Pál Esterházy represented Austria. Metternich had a rather complicated relationship with Wessenberg.<sup>31</sup> The Austrian envoy often did not respect Metternich's instructions from Vienna, which the Chancellor naturally took badly. In mid-1831, Metternich threatened him with dismissal, a move only halted through British intervention. France was represented by its ambassador, the experienced diplomat and former Foreign Minister Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord.<sup>32</sup>

Palmerston's aim was not to undermine the Vienna system. Like his predecessors, his initial primary objective was to preserve the peace. He knew that should Prussia or France intervene, Europe would once again stand on the brink of a

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<sup>26</sup> WARD, Adolphus William, GOOCH, George Peabody, *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy 1783–1919*, Cambridge 1923, p. 125.

<sup>27</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 23 October 1830, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 190; WEBSTER, *Palmerston, the Metternich*, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> BARTLETT, *Peace, War*, p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 107.

<sup>30</sup> MOWAT, p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> HELMREICH, Jonathan, *Belgium and Europe. A Study in Small Power Diplomacy*, The Hague 1976, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> LINGELBACH, Erza William, *Belgian Neutrality. Its Origin and Interpretation*. In: *The American Historical Review* 39, 1933, 1, p. 50.

general war. Ponsonby,<sup>33</sup> who was envoy in Brussels from December 1830, warned of Paris's warmongering:

The French democratic party may have more direct force than the republicans and will certainly be ready to join with them in any attempt to disturb the tranquillity of the country. That party looks to war as the means through which to attain its end: an integration [of Belgium] with France. It depends mainly upon the possible success of the position in France as opposed to Louis Philippe for the gratification of its wishes and this connection of interest.<sup>34</sup>

London's political interest in the case of Belgium was equal to that of the European level. What Palmerston did for the Belgians, he also did for Great Britain. The effort to achieve an independent Belgium also meant guaranteeing security for the British.<sup>35</sup> Last but not least, the driving force was not a desire to pursue the values of liberalism but rather to keep France contained. For Metternich, the main enemy was the revolution itself. In his opinion, peace in Europe could only be secured when the balance of power and the current order were preserved. Since the Belgians opposed the legitimate monarch, the Austrian Chancellor did not doubt that the Dutch King was on the right side. Clearly, he was unable to agree to anything forced through by revolution.<sup>36</sup>

Problems with the conference manifested themselves right from the beginning. William I had hoped that he would be sitting at the negotiating table as an equal member alongside representatives of the European Powers, but this did not occur. Instead, he had very limited opportunities to take part in discussions. The conference shortly declared that both parties to the conflict should end hostilities and preserve the status quo. This was positive news for the Belgians, as it effectively acknowledged them as a warring party. The Belgian delegation had thus acquired equal status at the negotiations. Full of confidence, on 22 November 1830, they announced to the National Congress the end of the rule of the House of Orange-Nassau on the Belgian throne. William's conviction that the crisis would resolve itself quickly faded. From a British perspective, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands had not been created as a reward for the House of Orange, as the

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<sup>33</sup> Ponsonby was in Belgium from 7 December 1830, to 11 June 1831. BINDOFF, Stanley Thomas, SMITH, Malcom, WEBSTER, Sir Charles Kingsley, *British Diplomatic Representatives 1789–1852*, London 1934, p. 137.

<sup>34</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, a copy of a dispatch from Ponsonby to Palmerston, London, 30 November 1830, 2 December 1830, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 190.

<sup>35</sup> DUMONT, Georges-Henry, *Histoire des Belges. Des Origines à la Dislocation des 17 Provinces*, Bruxelles 1954, p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> SOUTHGATE, p. 28.

Dutch King believed, but from a higher principle: to ensure war with France was not repeated by surrounding it with strong sovereign states.<sup>37</sup>

Metternich considered William I's dethronement to be a major rift in the European system of the time and a challenge to the Vienna Treaties.<sup>38</sup> The Eastern courts began justifiably to suspect Paris of intending to intervene in Belgium's favour and attempting to expand its territory. The French press spoke of war with Russia, and the government voted to increase the size of its armed forces.<sup>39</sup> The situation reached a head. A sudden turning point in events came with the previously mentioned uprising of the Poles against the Tsar's rule, which occurred on 29 November 1830. Nicholas I's hands were suddenly tied regarding Belgium. Russian policy was constrained by the strict mandate given to its representatives at the conference, who had to follow their Emperor's instructions closely.<sup>40</sup> The events in Poland, which restricted his ability to act, directly impacted Metternich, leaving him isolated on the Belgian issue and no longer able to rely on Russian support in pursuing a shared policy.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, Palmerston's vigilance concerning France increased.<sup>42</sup> Reports on the expansion of the French army, alongside the weakness of the Eastern Powers and the hopeless situation for the Dutch King, led the British Foreign Secretary to take action to prevent Belgium from falling into French hands.<sup>43</sup> On 20 December 1830, a protocol was signed at the conference approving the division of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and declaring its interest in forming an independent Belgium.<sup>44</sup> Brussels was to send its representative, Sylvain Van de Weyer, to the conference. In addition to keeping the peace in Europe, Belgian independence was crucial for stabilising the situation in France. If Palmerston had not taken such a straightforward step, the prevailing situation might have radicalised the situation in Paris, only contributing towards a higher risk of war. European conflict gave France space to revise the Vienna arrangements. As such, Palmerston's principal motivation was to secure Belgium's stability and independence while also pursuing British national interests.<sup>45</sup> The spirit of the Vienna system was

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37 BROWN, *Palmerston. A Biography*, p. 148.

38 SCHROEDER, *Systems, Stability, Statecraft*, p. 50.

39 WARD, GOOCH, p. 131.

40 SVOBODA, p. 54.

41 SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 158.

42 TROLLOPE, p. 51.

43 BROWN, *Palmerston. A Biography*, p. 151.

44 Protocol No. 7, *Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics and the Literature for the Years 1831*, London 1832, p. 361.

45 BROWN, *Palmerston. A Biography*, p. 148.

to be preserved in general guarantees for the newly established state.<sup>46</sup> For Metternich, creating an independent Belgium was a significant diplomatic error. During the entire conference, he tried to exploit distrust between Great Britain and France to disrupt their cooperation. An isolated France would not be able to pursue its aggressive policy, and Great Britain would have to focus more on Austria, bringing support for Habsburg interests in Europe.<sup>47</sup>

The 20 December 1830 Protocol did not mark the end of the Belgian Question but rather its beginning. Palmerston was confronted with various issues emerging from Belgian independence, such as establishing new borders, installing a new ruling dynasty, dividing up shared debt, free trade, and the fate of military fortresses.<sup>48</sup> Luxembourg's future was a separate chapter. Since the Congress of Vienna, it had been the private property of the Dutch King and a member of the German Confederation.<sup>49</sup> Palmerston assigned this task to Ponsonby, who informed London that a large section of the Belgian public was still calling for the selection of the young Prince of Orange. The British Foreign Secretary was concerned that France might come up with its own candidate. In an attempt to secure the Prince's support, he agreed to the Grand Duchy's transfer to Belgian administration. Ponsonby urged the Prince to get his father's consent and secure his enthronement.<sup>50</sup>

Talleyrand found out about Britain's intentions towards Luxembourg and condemned them harshly. He even proposed that the region come under French rule or that France be compensated with Belgian territory. Talleyrand's ideas forced Palmerston to declare Belgium a neutral state under international law so that it could remain outside Paris's influence as a sovereign state.<sup>51</sup> He presented this proposal at a conference session on 20 January 1831. Discussions on Belgian neutrality stretched into the late night. The principal critic, predictably, was the French representative, who demanded that Belgium first be formed on a confederation basis, after which territorial compensation could be claimed for France in exchange for agreement to Palmerston's proposal.<sup>52</sup> According to Talleyrand, compensation for Belgium's lost territory could be found on the Rhine. Palmerston explained to him, without commitment, that Anglo-French relations were not based on conquest and interventions. London could not allow the expansion

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<sup>46</sup> SOUTHGATE, p. 32.

<sup>47</sup> SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 154.

<sup>48</sup> TROLLOPE, p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> RIDLEY, p. 128.

<sup>50</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 123.

<sup>51</sup> LINGELBACH, p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> DUMONT, p. 34.

of Louis Philippe's territory towards the English Channel, as this would threaten Britain's trade interests and dangerously enhance France's position as a Great Power.<sup>53</sup>

In the end, the Foreign Secretary's intransigence won out. He knew that Louis Philippe's foreign policy depended on good relations with Great Britain, so France had no option but to accede to London's conditions.<sup>54</sup> The Orléans regime would be isolated internationally if Great Britain stopped cooperating with France. Palmerston's tactic – limiting through cooperation – was to become typical for his entire period at the Foreign Office. At various points, both the government in Paris and the Eastern Powers entertained the idea of dividing up Belgian territory. Hence, the Foreign Secretary exploited their conflicts and kept all the players in check. Britain itself was not interested in dividing up the land, and from a national political perspective, a status of independence suited it. Strategically, the land was crucially important, as Antwerp was "the pistol pointed at the heart of Britain."<sup>55</sup> For this geopolitical reason, Belgium's future arrangements were to play a security role for London.

French aggression was leverage on the Dutch, and the antipathy between the Orléans regime and the Eastern Powers was a means to gain Louis Philippe's support. Austria would not tolerate Paris gaining even an inch of Belgian land, and the other two Eastern courts shared this view.<sup>56</sup> These facts gave Palmerston an enormous diplomatic advantage.<sup>57</sup> Rather than being a staunch idealist and convinced pioneer of liberalism, Palmerston was more of a pragmatic politician who cared about the prosperity and success of his own country, which depended on maintaining international order and European peace so Great Britain could benefit the most.<sup>58</sup>

A plan of Eighteen Articles entitled *Bases of Separation* (*Bases de Séparation*) was approved at the conference on 20 January 1831. These articles defined the method of Dutch-Belgian separation. It was a de facto expansion of the previously adopted Protocol No. 7, approved in November 1830.<sup>59</sup> One crucial point was the article on the future border between the two states, which was drawn to be more

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<sup>53</sup> SOUTHGATE, p. 30; ABBENHUIS, Maartje, *An Age of Neutrals 1815–1914*, Cambridge 2014, p. 55.

<sup>54</sup> No. 11, *Protocole de la Conference Tenue au Foreign Office, le 20 Janvier 1830, Protocols of Conferences of London. Relative to Affairs of Belgium 1830–1831*, London 1832, p. 39.

<sup>55</sup> SOUTHGATE, p. 30.

<sup>56</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 14 January 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt England 193.

<sup>57</sup> SOUTHGATE, p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> BROWN, *Palmerston. A Biography*, p. 153.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

advantageous for William I. According to the proposal, Maastricht and Luxembourg were to go to the Dutch King.<sup>60</sup> Belgium was to be compensated through a modification to the clause on the free use of international rivers of 1815.<sup>61</sup> The protocol consequently outlined principles of self-determination and opened the path to international guarantees. France was the focus of the protocol, as evidenced by Palmerston's words: "France was not to get even a cabbage garden or a vineyard."<sup>62</sup> While the conference discussed settling new borders, dividing up shared debt, and the future of fortresses, the question of what status France was to hold in the Concert of Europe remained in the background.<sup>63</sup>

At this time, Metternich continued to pressure his ambassador to defend William I's interests as forthrightly as possible. Wessenberg's hands were tied, and he hoped the conference would at least find a compromise and break the deadlock.<sup>64</sup> In his haste, Palmerston accepted that the protocol contained many hidden problems. His actions resulted from recent events in Belgium, where the crisis over the unresolved succession had escalated. Britain's candidate, the Prince of Orange, had failed to gain broader support from the Belgian public, and the Belgians themselves began to seek their own candidate. In the end, even Metternich agreed to a situation in which William I's son would not sit on the Belgian throne. He was surprisingly open to another option, which the Powers agreed to. During this phase, the Austrian politician endeavoured to accommodate Palmerston and receive British support to consolidate the situation in northern Italy.<sup>65</sup> Other candidates included Otto of Bavaria, Austrian Archduke Karl, and the young Prince of Naples, Louis Philippe's favourite.<sup>66</sup> Several princes from the states of the German Confederation were also considered, but their candidacies were in significant conflict with French interests.<sup>67</sup>

The results of the negotiations of 20 January 1831 were received positively by the Dutch, but they caused an uproar in Belgium's National Congress. The Belgians did not intend to accept them.<sup>68</sup> As such, they turned to France about the fate of their country. In particular, the French radical Progress Party called for support for Belgium at any cost. Thus, full of confidence, the National Congress

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<sup>60</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 127; DUNK, von der Hermann, *Der Deutsche Vormärz und Belgien 1830/48*, Main 1966, p. 93.

<sup>61</sup> PROTHERO, George Walter, *Question of the Scheldt*, London 1920, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> SOUTHGATE, p. 33.

<sup>63</sup> BROWN, *Palmerston. A Biography*, p. 151.

<sup>64</sup> Cowley to Palmerston, Vienna, 7 January 1831, TNA, FO 120/113.

<sup>65</sup> Cowley to Palmerston, Vienna, 8 January 1831, TNA, FO 120/113.

<sup>66</sup> Lamb to Palmerston, Vienna, 26 September 1832, TNA, FO 120/125.

<sup>67</sup> PRICE, p. 222.

<sup>68</sup> HELMREICH, p. 18.

appointed Louis of Orléans, Duke of Nemours, son of Louis Philippe, to the Belgian throne.<sup>69</sup> Palmerston said the following about this proposal: "I must say that if the choice falls on Nemours, and the King of the French accepts, it will be proof that the policy of France is like an infection clinging to the walls of the dwelling and breaking out in every successive occupant who comes within their influence."<sup>70</sup> The situation, therefore, called for swift British intervention in Brussels. Ponsonby's task was to prevent the Duke of Nemours from becoming a candidate for the Belgian throne. This was not an easy task for the British diplomat. He spent many hours negotiating with Belgian representatives, trying to convince them that selecting Louis Philippe's son would lead to a general war.<sup>71</sup> In this matter, he also concurred with the Austrian representative:

The Belgians had been led to believe that the Allied Powers would never consent to their separation from Holland, and that they could expect their independence only with the support of the French government. It was therefore important both to turn them away from France and to make them realise that their fate could not be decided without the consent of the Powers represented at the London Conference.<sup>72</sup>

And so it happened. Palmerston repeated to Talleyrand that the selection of the French candidate would be considered a *casus belli* and that any such proposal must be discussed by all Powers at the upcoming conference. Metternich shared a similar opinion on France's policies, particularly worried about the impact they could have on the stability of Europe:

One must be informed in London, as we are here, of the tortuous course that King Louis-Philippe continues to pursue in the matter of the Duke of Nemours. It is beyond doubt that it is the King himself, who, until the very last moment, has conducted the intrigue concerning the election of his son. In the character of this Prince, an unbounded ambition is allied with a penchant for the most abject popularity; he sacrifices alternately these two passions by means of active intrigues.<sup>73</sup>

The French envoy awaited instructions from his government, which ultimately withdrew its support for its candidate under pressure from Louis Philippe.<sup>74</sup>

Even so, not all circumstances were demonstrably favourable. The Belgians refused to recognise the Bases of Separation due to concerns over the border and

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69 ARBLASTER, p. 179.

70 Palmerston to Granville, London, 1 February 1831, BULWER, vol. II, p. 38.

71 WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 129.

72 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 22 January, 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt England 193.

73 Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 19 February, 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt England 192.

74 SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 160.

the equal division of the shared debt, which they found disadvantageous. As such, they refused to accept any candidate from Great Britain or France for their throne. Palmerston remained adamant that the protocol be recognised. The signing of the Declaration of 17 February 1831, binding the Powers to protect European peace, demonstrated the unity of the conference representatives.<sup>75</sup> Talleyrand also added his signature, in complete contravention of official French policy.<sup>76</sup> The French government found itself in crisis. There were calls for war again, and National Guard units began to gather at the border with Belgium.<sup>77</sup> Louis Philippe had no choice but to dismiss Jacques Laffitte's government in mid-March 1831, replacing him with Jean Casimir Périer.<sup>78</sup> France's new leader was a pragmatic politician convinced that French foreign policy should be based not merely on loud slogans but primarily on national interests.<sup>79</sup> Palmerston commented on Périer's selection: "Pray and cultivate him and make him understand that the English government place great confidence in him, and consider his appointment as the strongest pledge and security for peace."<sup>80</sup> This change of government was a clear signal for London to continue cooperating and reaching a common consensus on this issue.

Similar changes were occurring in Belgium itself, where the capable politician Jean Louis Joseph Lebeau became Foreign Minister. These events eventually resulted in Leopold of Saxe-Coburg's name appearing among the list of candidates.<sup>81</sup> For the British government, he was the ideal choice. Leopold had previously been a candidate for the Greek throne but had rejected it. He was related to

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<sup>75</sup> Protocol of February 19th, *British and Foreign State Papers 1830–1831*, vol. XVIII, London 1833, p. 781.

<sup>76</sup> Esterházy had previously informed Metternich that criticism of Talleyrand had been present in Paris from the very beginning of the conference:

The main objection raised against the establishment of a conference in London related to the lack of popularity and general confidence that surrounds the person of Prince Talleyrand and in France. The British cabinet has responded that not only does it not admit this reasoning, which it regards only as a petty difficulty, but that it even wishes to put the Ambassador Rayneval on guard against what is considered as the essential.

Esterházy to Metternich, London, 26 October 1830, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt England 190.

<sup>77</sup> Palmerston to Granville, London, 18 February 1831, TNA, FO 27/424; Palmerston to Cowley, London, 24 February 1831, TNA, FO 120/111.

<sup>78</sup> SCHROEDER, *The Transformation*, p. 602.

<sup>79</sup> PRICE, p. 246.

<sup>80</sup> Palmerston to Granville, London, 15 March 1831, TNA, FO 27/424.

<sup>81</sup> RIDLEY, p. 131.

the British ruling family and had received an English education in his youth.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the question was not who the candidate would be but how and under what conditions he would sit on the throne.<sup>83</sup> Despite Metternich's claims to the British Ambassador in Vienna, Henry Wellesley, Baron Cowley, about the significance of the Belgian question, the Austrian Chancellor became so preoccupied with issues in the Papal States from February 1831 onwards that the London conference lost its priority.<sup>84</sup>

One issue remained between the Powers and France: the future of the Belgian fortresses. Périer's government insisted on their destruction.<sup>85</sup> Palmerston held the opinion that the Belgian government should decide on the fortresses' fate, and France did not have the right to interfere in the matter. In the end, he proposed dismantling certain fortresses if the other Powers agreed to accept Belgian neutrality.<sup>86</sup> Throughout May 1831, another crisis began to unfold. Leopold of Saxe-Coburg declared that he would accept the throne only if the Belgians accepted the Bases of Separation.<sup>87</sup> Palmerston once again entrusted Ponsonby with negotiating the conditions for accepting the plan, but he was unsuccessful. In his letter to the Belgian envoy, he wrote:

They must understand [the Belgians] that Holland will and must have in Limburg what belonged to her in 1790 and that the compensation for Luxemburg must be partly in the territory. It may not be amiss to let Lebeau know that [the] King of Holland, enraged at the unreasonableness of the Belgians, has proposed to the French government to partition Belgium between them; I have no reason to suppose that France is at present inclined to accept the proposition.<sup>88</sup>

It was evident that Great Britain would never agree to such a solution, but the idea began to take hold among the other Powers due to Leopold's rejection of the throne. Nevertheless, Palmerston's declaration fell on fertile ground.

In the second half of May 1831, British and Belgian representatives began intensive discussions. During a seven-hour negotiation at Marlborough House, Pal-

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<sup>82</sup> TREVELYAN, George Macaulay, *Lord Grey of the Reform Bill. Being the Life of Charles, Second Earl Grey*, London, New York, Toronto 1929, p. 352.

<sup>83</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 135.

<sup>84</sup> Cowley to Palmerston, Vienna, 15 February 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 193; Cowley to Palmerston, Vienna, 18 January 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 193.

<sup>85</sup> Palmerston to Granville, London, 18 February 1831, TNA, FO 120/111.

<sup>86</sup> From Palmerston's point of view, the neutralisation of Belgium was a shrewd diplomatic strategy, primarily motivated by Britain's desire to uphold the balance of power in Europe and to curb any potential hegemony by a single nation, particularly France. Belgium's strategic location made it a crucial point of interest, and ensuring its neutrality was key to preventing its use as a base for military operations by any major Power, thereby safeguarding British interests against domination by France or other Powers. ABBENHUIS, p. 56.

<sup>87</sup> Estreházy to Metternich, 17 May 1831, London, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt England 194.

<sup>88</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 135.

merston took part for Britain and Leopold, Paul Devaux, and Jean Baptiste Notthomb for Belgium. A draft treaty proposal was put together.<sup>89</sup> The outcome of the discussions was submitted at the subsequent conference session under The Eighteen Articles. This new treaty bound the Powers to commit to revising borders, according to which Luxembourg would come under Belgium.<sup>90</sup> Dividing up the debt and navigation on the River Scheldt was now more advantageous for Belgium.<sup>91</sup> The Netherlands' envoy, Baron Van Zuylen van Nyevelt, protested against the new treaty immediately.<sup>92</sup> When reports of the outcome of the conference negotiations arrived in The Hague, the Dutch King was scathing and demanded his right to territory acquired between 1790 and 1814.<sup>93</sup> Austria, Russia, and Prussia supported William I and protested to the Belgian and British representatives:

We stood firm against the dangers of a separation of the Five Powers at such a grave moment, and focused our efforts on making our conduct as least unfavourable as possible to the interests of His Majesty the King of the Netherlands. [...] The question of Luxembourg, to which the Belgians, supported by the French government and the London cabinet, have attached a *sine qua non* condition, was dealt with all the compromises and reservations that could be obtained.<sup>94</sup>

It was one of the first signs of the forthcoming political strategy. In this case, Palmerston did not hesitate to negotiate this proposal behind the back of the Dutch king and the representatives of the Eastern Powers.

Meanwhile, the new proposal changed Leopold's position. He ultimately accepted the Belgian crown on 26 June 1831.<sup>95</sup> The newly selected Belgian King swore an oath to the new constitution approved by Congress based on the express sovereignty of the nation.<sup>96</sup> The constitution guaranteed complete freedom of the press and education and made the government responsible to parliament. In character, it was one of the most liberal constitutions in Europe at that time.<sup>97</sup>

William I refused to accept the situation and decided to take military action. His breach of the truce was a hasty act, and it was not long before the Powers

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<sup>89</sup> HELMREICH, p. 49.

<sup>90</sup> Protocol of 21 May 1831, *British and Foreign State Papers 1830–1831*, vol. XVIII, p. 798.

<sup>91</sup> SCHROEDER, *The Transformation*, p. 686.

<sup>92</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 21 May 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 193.

<sup>93</sup> MOWAT, p. 72.

<sup>94</sup> Esterházy, Wessenberg to Metternich, London, 27 June 1837, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 194.

<sup>95</sup> SVOBODA, p. 61.

<sup>96</sup> ASHLEY, vol. I, p. 260.

<sup>97</sup> ARBLASTER, p. 180.

responded.<sup>98</sup> Palmerston was ready to defend Belgium even without allies. The resolve to use military power against the Netherlands contravened his previous, and progressively ever more contradictory, claim that non-intervention was a guarantee of peace. Less than nine months after being appointed Foreign Secretary, he was willing to dispense with the doctrine he had firmly supported to pursue British interests. The Belgian Question was the first time Palmerston was prepared to take this step. In France, reports of the occupation led to a flood of outrage. The French army was immediately mobilised and ready to march to the Belgian border. In the meantime, troops led by the Prince of Orange defeated the poorly equipped Belgian army and occupied almost the entire territory lost in 1830. Great Britain agreed with Paris's intervention to support the Belgians, regardless of the possible consequences of French occupation.<sup>99</sup> This was, to some extent, also because of the poor state of the British ground troops.<sup>100</sup> The renewed conflict energised Talleyrand, who told Palmerston what mistakes had been made regarding Belgium. At that time, the French troops crossed the Belgian border and headed for Brussels.<sup>101</sup> The spectre of an evident defeat, alongside the advice of a British diplomat in Belgium, Robert Adair, led William I to withdraw his troops.<sup>102</sup> Through this risky action, the Dutch King tried to secure support from the Austrian Emperor. However, Francis I and Metternich began to lose patience with William I, and the Dutch king received no official support.<sup>103</sup>

For the British government, the French army needed to remain on Belgian territory only for as long as necessary. If their army refused to withdraw, Great Britain would not hesitate to force France to do so, even if it meant using its forces. Paris sensed the opportunity to receive certain benefits from the situation. France's Foreign Minister, Horace François Bastien Sébastiani de La Porta, urged Leopold I to give up some of his territories to France as compensation for French assistance. The French minister was a radical who wanted to return the political power it had lost to his country. He believed it would be better to fight for a renewed status than live in permanent humiliation.<sup>104</sup> The Belgian King firmly rejected Sébastiani's suggestion. A second request was to destroy the fortresses before the French soldiers left. Palmerston had no interest in hearing such ideas and sent a harsh note to Paris, rejecting French claims against Belgium. In re-

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<sup>98</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 1 August 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 193.

<sup>99</sup> RENDALL, *A Qualified Success*, p. 282.

<sup>100</sup> SOUTHGATE, p. 34.

<sup>101</sup> HARRIS, Robin, *Talleyrand. Betrayer and Saviour of France*, London 2007, p. 300.

<sup>102</sup> SKED, *Metternich and Austria*, p. 139.

<sup>103</sup> SOUTHGATE, p. 36.

<sup>104</sup> SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 160.

sponse, Sébastiani asserted the right to sign bilateral agreements between Belgium and France. Leopold I was presented with the French proposal to adopt the Eighteen Articles on the condition that the chain of fortresses be destroyed.<sup>105</sup> Ultimately, the Belgian King freed himself from French pressure in a letter, leaving the final word on thorny issues to London, where Palmerston played the decisive role.<sup>106</sup>

Following William's army's invasion, the conference's situation changed radically. While Great Britain and France were adamantly on the Belgians' side, the Dutch King was becoming popular again among the Eastern Powers. Suppression of the Polish Uprising allowed the Tsar to take a more forceful position on the Belgian Question. The Eastern courts increasingly called on William I to stand firm in his demands.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, public opinion in Great Britain had begun shifting away from support for the Belgians. It was, therefore, evident that the Eighteen Articles could not be defended. The only possible solution was to find a compromise between the Bases of Separation and the Articles. The first task was to secure a truce between the two sides and begin negotiations. The focal point was the issue of rearrangement of the border. According to the new proposal, the Belgian would have to give up much of Limburg and Maastricht, including a line along the River Meuse.<sup>108</sup> According to Palmerston, this change was inevitable. Under his leadership, the Twenty-Four Articles were proposed at the conference on 15 October 1831.<sup>109</sup>

The British Foreign Secretary had to vigorously defend his position in front of representatives of the Eastern courts, who were steadfastly on the side of the Dutch King. Metternich was clear on this matter and reassured Esterházy of the correct course of his policy:

It is not you, nor one of your colleagues, nor even Mr de Talleyrand and Lord Palmerston, who must be held responsible; it is the poor France and England gone mad who must bear the blame. Men individually can only diminish the consequences of misplaced evils beyond their reach.<sup>110</sup>

It was all the harder to pursue his proposals when Talleyrand had to await instructions from Paris, without which he could not sign anything. Palmerston later said of the French ambassador:

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<sup>105</sup> Palmerston to Granville, London, 5 August 1831, TNA, FO 120/113; ASHLEY, vol. I, p. 261.

<sup>106</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 140.

<sup>107</sup> Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 24 August 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 192.

<sup>108</sup> Protocol of 14 October 1831, *British and Foreign State Papers 1830–1831*, vol. XVIII, p. 893.

<sup>109</sup> SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 142.

<sup>110</sup> Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 17 October 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 192.

He never wished to make Belgium independent . . . This was remarkably shown during our last discussions in Conference upon the 24 Articles before we finally settled them. Under the pretence that his mouth was closed by Sébastiani's order to sign nothing without previous reference to Paris for instructions, he was literally silent in all my battles with the other three Powers and never gave me the slightest assistance in my efforts to procure for Belgium the compensations which the Articles afford her for the sacrifices she makes in territory and debt.<sup>111</sup>

Palmerston further stated that he wished "the French would make up their minds to act with good faith about Belgium, and we should settle the matter in three weeks."<sup>112</sup>

Leopold I took issue with the new treaty. He complained that he had become the King of Belgium based on the Eighteen Articles and even considered abdicating.<sup>113</sup> Palmerston said that if he were to do that, then he would be Europe's "lost man for ever,"<sup>114</sup> and he would furthermore threaten Belgium's very existence. On the other hand, the British Foreign Secretary had to convince the Dutch representative that the revised treaty was more advantageous for him than the Eighteen Articles and that he anticipated their support.<sup>115</sup> Even so, William I was unwilling to accept even this proposal.<sup>116</sup> Esterházy commented on the hopeless situation of the King of the Netherlands in his report to Vienna: "His desire would be to postpone the issue further in the hope of finding a more favourable acceptance of his propositions. This would be difficult to achieve, as it is no longer in his power to bring about the desired result."<sup>117</sup> He did not even want to accept an extended truce. Palmerston informed the Netherlands via Bagot: "The first Dutchman who steps across the frontier will cost Amsterdam and Rotterdam pretty dearly."<sup>118</sup> Thus, British diplomacy was busy with the tricky task of convincing both parties to accept the newly laid out conditions.

Under the influence of events unfolding, all that Leopold I could do was accept the proposal. He was also forced to do so because he was de facto recognised only by Great Britain and France. Palmerston convinced Van de Weyer that adopting the Articles would automatically mean Leopold was also recognised de

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<sup>111</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, pp. 142–143.

<sup>112</sup> SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 161.

<sup>113</sup> RIDLEY, p. 137.

<sup>114</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 143.

<sup>115</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 9 November 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 195.

<sup>116</sup> SCHELTEMA, Johann Friedrich, *Holland and Belgium*. In: *The North American Review* 210, 1919, 769, p. 771.

<sup>117</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 16 November 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 195.

<sup>118</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 144.

jure. Negotiations again went into the early hours, but an agreement was reached in the end.<sup>119</sup> The treaty was signed in November 1831, and Palmerston said of the negotiations: “It is an immense thing to have got Austria, Russia, and Prussia to sign a formal treaty of friendship and guarantee with Leopold. Belgium is thus placed out of all danger, and the sulky silence of the Dutch King becomes at once a matter of little or no importance to anybody but himself.”<sup>120</sup> Despite this, Austrian representatives signed the protocol primarily to prevent Great Britain and France from unilaterally deciding the fate of Western Europe.<sup>121</sup> Esterházy informed Metternich that, given the developments of the events, the Eastern Powers had no choice but to yield to British pressure:

The Prussian and Russian envoys have already informed their Courts that, considering the progress of events and the dangers that might result for the peace of Europe from a longer procrastination of a definitive arrangement, they might find themselves in the case of signing a convention with the Plenipotentiaries of Belgium without waiting for the adhesion of the Dutch government, foreseeing that they would be vigorously supported in this regard by the British Cabinet, which is keen to ensure that the establishment of Prince Leopold in Belgium is no longer a problem.<sup>122</sup>

Palmerston’s policy was a partial success in this regard, but optimism would soon end.

The treaty did not address all the fundamental problems; William I did not even want to discuss it, and the Eastern courts refused to ratify it. Meanwhile, French diplomats came up with a curious proposal, requesting that the fortresses in Philippeville and Marienburg be kept.<sup>123</sup> In Palmerston’s eyes, this meant nothing less than an attempt to get these fortresses under French government administration in the future. From a security standpoint, the fortresses would then not form a barrier against France but a French barrier against Europe.<sup>124</sup> When the Foreign Secretary rejected these proposals, Sébastiani turned his pressure on Leopold I, attempting to force him to align with his government’s stance. Leopold I then complained to Palmerston of his difficult position and threatened partial concessions to France. The only thing he could do was postpone the signature of

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<sup>119</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 15 November 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 195, Treaty Between Great Britain, Austria, France, Prussia and Russia, and Belgium, Relative to the Separation of Belgium from Holland, *British and Foreign State Papers 1830–1831*, vol. XVIII, p. 645.

<sup>120</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 145.

<sup>121</sup> Chad to Palmerston, Berlin, 12 January 1832, TNA, FO 64/181; SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 166.

<sup>122</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 9 November, 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 195.

<sup>123</sup> BROWN, *Palmerston. A Biography*, p. 152.

<sup>124</sup> SCHROEDER, *The Transformation*, p. 688.

the submitted treaty. After lengthy negotiations, the situation calmed down, and it was agreed that the fortresses in question should be dismantled. The 14 December 1831 convention states:

In consequence of the changes which the independence and neutrality of Belgium have effected in the military situation of that Country, as well as in its disposable means of defence, the High Contracting Parties agree to cause to be dismantled such of the Fortresses constructed, repaired, or enlarged in Belgium, since Year 1815, either wholly or partly at the cost of the Courts of Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia, of which the maintenance would henceforward only become useless charge.<sup>125</sup>

The French government was also assured that Belgium's independence would remain intact, and Paris would have the same negotiating position as the other Powers. The conference still had crucial tasks to complete, such as securing the treaty's ratification by the remaining Powers and obtaining William I's consent. In the upcoming discussions, the consequences of the quickly adopted Protocol of November 1830 were evident, mainly in the reassessment of free trade on the Scheldt and the shared debt.<sup>126</sup> It took almost a year for the Conference to come to an agreement on these issues.<sup>127</sup>

At the end of 1831, the final agreement was reached on political matters. The progressive revision of the treaties successfully set out the border, resolved the succession issue, and clarified the political status of the Belgian state. As such, Palmerston could celebrate a triumph. Nevertheless, in order for the new state to be able to operate, the remaining problems needed to be resolved. One crucial point was the mentioned ratification of the November 1831 treaty by the Eastern Powers and the Dutch King. The Foreign Secretary hoped for a rapid approval process. In this, he was mistaken. A unified approach from all the European Powers was required to force the Dutch King to sign. In this context, Austrian diplomats were aligned with the effort to convince William I of the necessity of signing the revised treaty. The representatives from Vienna prioritised the interests of peace in Europe over the preferences of the conservative monarch:

A whole month has passed since the communication of the 24 Articles established by the Conference, without our being able to obtain a positive response from His Majesty. He, however, cannot remain silent any longer on the determination of the Five Courts, eager to ensure the peace of Europe. His desire to govern again in favourable terms the question of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Duchy of Limburg has led him to refer to the Berlin

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<sup>125</sup> Convention Between Great Britain, Austria, France, Prussia and Russia, and Belgium, Relative to the Belgic Fortresses, *British and Foreign State Papers 1830–1831*, vol. XVIII, p. 667.

<sup>126</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 16 November 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 195.

<sup>127</sup> WEBSTER, *Palmerston, the Metternich*, p. 10.

Cabinet, while the Plenipotentiaries attached to the Hague continue to observe the state of things without being able to take any action.<sup>128</sup>

The resolution of this issue did not depend solely on Palmerston's diplomatic efforts but on reaching an agreement among all the Great Powers to force William I to accept the terms established at the London Conference.<sup>129</sup>

The treaty's most significant opponent was the Russian Tsar. Nicholas I thought that in approving the document, his representatives were overstepping their mandate. In his subsequent letter to The Hague, he assured William I that he would not allow the treaty to be ratified under any circumstances.<sup>130</sup> Both Russian representatives strongly objected to the Emperor's protest. According to Matuszewicz, adopting the Treaty of the Twenty-Four Articles was the only correct option, considering both the unpredictable actions of the Dutch sovereign and Russian foreign policy. He believed it was not possible to approach the Belgian question from an absolutist principle but rather to adapt a resolution to the problem to actual conditions, such as to preserve good relations with Great Britain while also focusing on the country's political interests.<sup>131</sup> Vienna and Berlin had significant reservations.<sup>132</sup> In an attempt to take as little initiative as possible, the two courts referred to St Petersburg's position.<sup>133</sup> Another pretext for postponing ratification was the dispute between Great Britain and France over the fortresses.<sup>134</sup> According to the Austrian Chancellor, this time it was directly Palmerston, and not his or the French government, who was responsible for the split between the two countries.<sup>135</sup> The situation was not favourable for the British Foreign Secretary domestically either. Issues related to electoral reform had aroused concerns of the Tories returning to power.<sup>136</sup> A Tory victory would immediately end support for Belgium.<sup>137</sup> Wellington had strongly protested the treaty's adop-

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128 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 16 November 1831, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 196.

129 CORY, William, *A Guide to Modern English History*, vol. II, New York 1882, p. 265.

130 The primary reason for his reluctance stemmed from his aversion to the Orléanist regime and French politics in general. Metternich to Wessenberg, 21 March, 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 200.

131 SVOBODA, p. 64.

132 Metternich to Wessenberg, Vienna, 29 February 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 200.

133 Metternich to Wessenberg, Vienna, 11 March 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 200.

134 WEBSTER, *Palmerston, the Metternich*, p. 10.

135 Metternich to Wessenberg, Vienna, 16 April 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 200; METTERNICH-WINNEBURG, vol. V, p. 229.

136 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 26 February 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 196; BRIGGS, Asa, *The Age of Improvement*, London 1958, p. 256.

137 Esterházy to Metternich, London, 15 May 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 196.

tion in the House of Lords.<sup>138</sup> These circumstances compelled Palmerston to expedite the entire process as much as possible.<sup>139</sup>

It was evident that everything hinged on Russia's position. In the end, under pressure from his diplomats, the Tsar decided to send a confidante, diplomat Alexey Fyodorovich Orlov, to the Netherlands. His objective was to find a diplomatic route to force the Dutch King to agree to adopt the treaty's conditions.<sup>140</sup> Palmerston was hopeful of his mission and was informed of Russian intentions by Heytesbury:

I have very sanguine hopes of seeing the question of ratification very shortly brought to satisfactory settlement a great deal will of course depend upon the result of Count Orloff's Mission, and it will be through him that Your Lordship will probably learn the final decision of this government.<sup>141</sup>

To Orlov's disappointment, he was unable to convince William I to make any concessions. The only thing the Dutch King was willing to accept was recognition of Leopold I as Belgium's legitimate sovereign. The Tsar's patience with the Netherlands seemed to be at its end. This was due to both William's intransigence and Great Britain's expression of goodwill towards St Petersburg. During the 1815 negotiations in Vienna, Castlereagh secured subsidies to Russia in exchange for support for his proposal to establish the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.<sup>142</sup> These payments depended on the union's existence, and with the dissolution of the formation, this agreement also ended.<sup>143</sup> Palmerston succeeded in extending the agreement so that the money would now be paid if there was a Tsar's guarantee of Belgian independence.<sup>144</sup> This positive step for Russia made a big impression on the Nicholas I, but it did not yet guarantee ratification.<sup>145</sup>

In the meantime, Palmerston endeavoured to focus on the other two Eastern courts. He charged Lamb, the newly appointed ambassador to Austria, with the

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<sup>138</sup> Grey to Lieven, London, 6 February 1832, STRANGE, vol. II, p. 441.

<sup>139</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 149.

<sup>140</sup> Heytesbury to Palmerston, St Petersburg, 19 February, TNA, FO 65/199.

<sup>141</sup> Heytesbury to Palmerston, St Petersburg, 27 February 1832, TNA, FO 65/199.

<sup>142</sup> NICOLSON, p. 209.

<sup>143</sup> More about financial matters and their influence on foreign policy after the Congress of Vienna can be found in: SLUGA, Glenda, *Who Hold the Balance of the World? Bankers at the Congress of Vienna and in International History*. In: American Historical Review, Oxford, 122, 2017, 5, p. 1403–1430. SLUGA, Glenda, *The Invention of International Order: Remaking Europe after Napoleon*, New Jersey, 2021.

<sup>144</sup> Convention between Great Britain and Russia, Relative to the Russian Dutch Loan, *British and Foreign State Papers 1830–1831*, vol. XVIII, p. 928.

<sup>145</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 150.

task of getting Vienna to ratify the treaty.<sup>146</sup> A day after his appointment, Palmerston instructed him on what approach to take towards Metternich. These instructions stated:

The matter of the most urgent importance at the present moment, and to which Your Excellency will immediately request the attention of the Austrian Cabinet, is the Treaty of the November 15th for the separation of Holland and Belgium, and if you should find upon arrival at Vienna, that the Austrian government has not sent off their Ratification of that Treaty, your utmost intentions should be directed to induce them to do so without any further delay.<sup>147</sup>

Lamb submitted a proposal to Metternich that included British support for Austrian matters in the Italian states in exchange for adopting the treaty. Initially, the offer seemed to induce the Austrian Chancellor to the ratification. Subsequently, it became evident that Vienna's stance relied on Berlin's position, which again referred to St Petersburg's position.<sup>148</sup> Negotiations were again at an impasse. Austria's move was intelligent because Russian opinion on the matter remained negative. The Tsar did not want to ratify until the Dutch King agreed.<sup>149</sup> Metternich also believed that the Treaty of 15 November 1831 was written to benefit Britain and France.<sup>150</sup> In a letter to Wessenberg, he wrote: "We have doubts that the current complication, a result of the French proposal flattering the British government, shall bear fruit only for these two governments."<sup>151</sup> The British Foreign Secretary interpreted these words as meaning that Vienna's policy of opposition was pushing London towards closer cooperation with Paris.<sup>152</sup>

Nevertheless, Palmerston could not rely on French assistance either.<sup>153</sup> He informed the British ambassador in Paris, Granville, of his doubts about Talleyrand's position: "He was ready to agree to almost anything because he had no real desire that Belgium should become a prosperous and independent state."<sup>154</sup> The resolution of the situation was another crisis in the French government, which arose in the spring of 1832. Due to domestic political circumstances, Talleyrand

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<sup>146</sup> Wilhelm IV to Francis I, London, 14 May 1832, TNA, FO 120/114.

<sup>147</sup> Palmerston to Lamb, London, 28 January 1832, TNA, FO 120/116.

<sup>148</sup> Heytesbury to Palmerston, St Petersburg, 7 January 1832, TNA, FO 65/199.

<sup>149</sup> Palmerston to Lamb, London, 28 January 1832, TNA, FO 120/116.

<sup>150</sup> Protocole de la Conférence tenue au Foreign Office, le 18 Avril 1832, *British and Foreign State Papers 1831–1832*, vol. XIX, London 1834, p. 98.

<sup>151</sup> Metternich to Wessenberg, Vienna, 21 March 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 200.

<sup>152</sup> Palmerston to Lamb, London, 30 June 1832, TNA, FO 120/119.

<sup>153</sup> COLBY, Charles William, *The Earlier Relations of England and Belgium*. In: *The American Historical Review* 21, 1915, 1, p. 69.

<sup>154</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 153.

was forced to return to Paris, and his role was taken over by the ambassador at The Hague, Rohan Mareuil. In him, Palmerston found a much better negotiating partner than his predecessor. At the same time, he began to see the central axis of his policy in cooperating with France. His main intention was to maintain control over Paris while securing the most favourable national political conditions for Britain's prosperity. This could only be achieved if France followed Great Britain's policy.<sup>155</sup>

The stalemate continued during June and July 1832. The British did not let up in their efforts to find a consensus with the Dutch King. A solution for further negotiations was the unconditional withdrawal of the Dutch army from Antwerp fortifications. William I was willing to concede to territorial changes and give up some of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and Limburg. Nevertheless, he was not open to discussing the division of the debt and trade on the Scheldt.<sup>156</sup> Brussels referred to the continuing Dutch occupation, stating that if their troops did not withdraw and free passage of the Scheldt was not allowed, Belgian independence was impossible. Palmerston realised that the resolution of the Scheldt was the key to cutting through this Gordian knot. In order to resolve the problem, he invited representatives of Belgian and Dutch trade to grasp the entire breadth of the matter. The issue of the Scheldt incorporated other specific challenges, such as problems with pilots, fishing, fishing rights and control of weirs. The focus was primarily on three points: duties to be imposed on ships, the passage of Belgian goods through the canal, and the financial institution *Syndicat d'Amortissement*'s asset problems.<sup>157</sup> Palmerston developed a basic tariff of 1 florin per ton of Belgian goods for the Netherlands, which was eventually changed to a fixed annual fee of 150,000 florins.<sup>158</sup> The Dutch King's representatives vehemently rejected this solution.<sup>159</sup>

The second point did not just apply to the Netherlands and Belgium. Since Belgian goods were mainly sold in the German Confederation, Prussian diplomats became involved in the discussions.<sup>160</sup> One of the proposals was to construct a railway line from Belgium to the Rhineland to transport goods, taking over the

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155 SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe*, p. 169.

156 Lé Plénipotentiaire des Pays Bas à la Conférence, *British and Foreign State Papers 1831–1832*, vol. XIX, p. 124.

157 PROTHERO, p. 8.

158 Loi de la Belgique, qui arrête le Budget de Ministré des Finances pour 1833, *British and Foreign State Papers 1832–1833*, vol. XX, London 1835, p. 759.

159 Palmerston to Ferguson, London, 8 July 1832, TNA, FO 120/119.

160 Even though the matter also affected the other states of the German Confederation, only the Prussians were invited to the discussions.

role previously held by shipping. This would represent a provisional solution to the problem, but the Foreign Secretary opposed the idea and demanded the unconditional opening of international canals as soon as possible. He was supported in this by some German Confederation states, which profited from traditional trade. In exchange for the free passage of Belgian goods, some territory was to be awarded to the Netherlands, which had not been part of the country before 1790 but was of significant strategic importance. The Belgians were to be charged an annual fee of 600,000 florins for using Dutch canals, rivers, and roads.<sup>161</sup>

The third point involved the shared debt. According to the Bases of Separation, Belgium was to take on that part of the debt based on the total sum from the period when Belgium was not even part of the union. The Dutch demanded this amount as a charge from the period of wars against Louis XIV. In the end, the total sum rose to 9,000,000 florins annually, including the charge for using canals.<sup>162</sup> The Belgians also sought money hidden in the *Syndicat d'Amortissement*, an institution actually involved in financial speculation. Palmerston, aware of this fact, pressured William I to publish this organisation's documents, which was intended to pressure him to ratify the treaty earlier. He was nevertheless unsuccessful, and the entire matter ended. The Dutch ignored all the British proposals. Palmerston realised that Amsterdam must be forced to change its stance through other means than diplomacy.<sup>163</sup>

The imposition of sanctions on the Netherlands represented a problematic and dangerous way out of the complex international situation. The British Foreign Secretary had long been reluctant to take this approach. The events that elicited the issue within British politics caused a major crisis. Nor were the public in favour of such a solution.<sup>164</sup> Even King William IV opposed his country siding with France, enforcing its demands through a military solution. Internationally, Palmerston had to reckon with a negative response from Austria, Russia, and Prussia. As such, he endeavoured to negotiate conditions which all the Powers would agree to. In early June 1832, he sent a letter to the envoys of the Eastern Powers informing them of Britain's intentions to intervene by force against the Dutch King.<sup>165</sup> In instructions for the embassy in Vienna, he urged Austria and

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<sup>161</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 161.

<sup>162</sup> The British Plenipotentiary to the Conference September 24th 1832, *British and Foreign State Papers 1831–1832*, vol. XIX, p. 153.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Aberdeen to Wellington, London, 4 November 1832, WELLINGTON, vol. VIII, p. 433.

<sup>165</sup> Les Plénipotentiaires Fracais at Anglais aux Plénipotentiaires de Prusse et de Russie, *British and Foreign State Papers 1831–1832*, vol. XIX, p. 718.

the other Powers to cooperate.<sup>166</sup> He noted the threat of continental war without an immediate resolution to the Belgian Question.<sup>167</sup>

During diplomatic negotiations, Palmerston and Sébastiani began discussing coercive measures. Although the Belgians wanted the French army to intervene, the British Foreign Secretary had many reservations about this idea. He entertained the notion that the Anglo-French navy should be used to blockade the Dutch coast.<sup>168</sup> Ultimately, Grey and the British King agreed with this plan. Nevertheless, the consent of the actual British government was still lacking.<sup>169</sup>

It was also at this time that the Austrian Chancellor proposed a new solution: financial sanctions on the Netherlands instead of a military solution.<sup>170</sup> During September 1832, it seemed that the other two Eastern Powers would also agree to Metternich's plan. The new Prussian Foreign Minister, Johann Peter Friedrich Antoni, had pledged to support Metternich in his plans. But this all collapsed after Matuszewicz returned from St Petersburg with instructions from the Tsar.<sup>171</sup> Nicholas refused to approve a proposal which damaged the Dutch King in any way.<sup>172</sup> Palmerston saw these conclusions as a partial betrayal. As a result, the Tsar's declaration led to closer cooperation between Great Britain and France. The government in London began to lean towards military intervention. Palmerston considered using the French army to push the Dutch forces out of the fortress in Antwerp.<sup>173</sup> Bülow, on behalf of the Prussian side, opposed this proposal and issued a sharp statement condemning the possible Anglo-French intervention.<sup>174</sup> Palmerston showed his renowned tenacity and responded that Great Britain and France would occupy the fortress together regardless of the opinions of the Eastern Powers. It was Palmerston's pragmatism that lay behind this statement. He was convinced that Prussia would not embark on an open war against Great Britain and France because of the Netherlands.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Neumann to Metternich, London, 3 July 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 197.

<sup>167</sup> Palmerston to Lamb, London, 30 June 1832, TNA, FO 120/119.

<sup>168</sup> Neumann to Metternich, London, 6 November, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 198.

<sup>169</sup> More on the agreement regarding the French intervention in Belgium can be found in: *Convention conclue entre la France et la Belgique, pour l'entrée d'une Armée Francaise en Belgique, British and Foreign State Papers 1831–1832*, vol. XIX, p. 1417.

<sup>170</sup> Metternich to Schwarzenberg, Berlin, 13 October 1832, METTERNICH-WINNEBURG, vol. V, p. 275.

<sup>171</sup> SVOBODA, p. 65.

<sup>172</sup> Lieven to Cowper, Richmond, 9 October 1832, SUDLEY, p. 44.

<sup>173</sup> Lieven to Cowper, Richmond, 15 October 1832, SUDLEY, p. 36.

<sup>174</sup> Neumann to Metternich, London, 9 November 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 198.

<sup>175</sup> BROWN, *Palmerston. A Biography*, p. 160.

An important impetus for the British government's decision to agree to impose sanctions paradoxically came from France. On 11 October 1832, a new government was established in Paris, leading to a closer Anglo-French *entente*.<sup>176</sup> For Palmerston, this alliance also represented a powerful barrier against Russian domination on the Continent.<sup>177</sup> The new Foreign Minister was Duke Victor de Broglie, who was sympathetic towards Britain.<sup>178</sup> That day, the British government voted in favour of military intervention against Amsterdam.<sup>179</sup> Considering the authority of the Russian representatives at the London conference, St Petersburg could not respond suitably to the developments.<sup>180</sup> In the end, Nicholas I decided to withdraw his diplomatic representatives, and Russia de facto left Prussia in charge of defending its interests in the Belgian question.<sup>181</sup> Discussions between Palmerston and Ancillon took place on 30 October 1832. The Prussian minister attempted to obtain consent for parallel Prussian action in Limburg. The withdrawal of Russian representatives left Berlin's delegation without support, making it impossible for Prussia to advance any proposals.<sup>182</sup>

The military action itself began on 15 November 1832 and lasted until the end of the year. Under the command of General Étienne Maurice Gérard, the French army captured the Antwerp fortress on 22 December 1832. The Anglo-French naval blockade led to millions of pounds in losses for Dutch traders and adversely affected British trade as well.<sup>183</sup> Neumann reported on the complex position of Prussian diplomacy, which was striving to secure better conditions for Wilhelm I: "Baron de Bülow finds himself in a completely different position than us, with his hands tied just as ours are regarding action – his cabinet, though, does not hide how much it would like the negotiations on this unfortunate matter to resume."<sup>184</sup> The Austrian ambassador did not remain passive and actively sought to

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176 GRUNER, *Metternich, Palmerston*, p. 22.

177 Neumann to Metternich, London, 16 October, 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 197; BITTIS, Alexander, *Russia and The Eastern Question. Army, Government, and Society 1815–1833*, Oxford 2006, p. 482.

178 WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 165.

179 British Orders in Council, Prohibiting Trade with the Netherlands, and Laying an Embargo Upon Netherland Vessels in British Ports, *British and Foreign State Papers 1831–1832*, vol. XIX, p. 1420.

180 "Lord Grey strongly condemns the Russian declaration and blames Count Matusevicz. He told me that it was of the utmost importance that the Powers appear to remain united." Esterházy to Metternich, London, 9 November 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 198.

181 SVOBODA, p. 65.

182 RENDALL, *A Qualified Success*, p. 285.

183 Neumann to Metternich, London, 4 December 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 198.

184 Neumann to Metternich, London, 22 January 1833, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 201.

persuade Palmerston to find a compromise that would satisfy both opposing parties. Yet, this effort turned out to be an exceedingly complex challenge:

Lord Palmerston raises false hopes for this cabinet; I know him too well to attribute to him the intention of accusing our cabinet of a fault it did not commit when he attempted to place on us a lack of good faith which could improve his parliamentary position. [ . . ] The Principal Secretary of State avoided mentioning this matter because it was not to his advantage. It is needless for me to inform Your Excellency how concerned I was about this whole affair. Since the discussion at the conference, I have seen that there were more opportunities for compromises to be made than advantages to be gained.<sup>185</sup>

The Dutch King's only hope lay in the potential collapse of Grey's government due to electoral reform. Once this plan had fallen apart, William I was forced to restart negotiations.<sup>186</sup>

In the end, the Dutch diplomats agreed to the conditions submitted to them on 21 May 1833, even though they were not as advantageous as those declared at the London Conference in 1832. They opened the Scheldt and Meuse rivers to the Belgians, including paths and canals, and all customs duties were also removed. Belgium ignored the payment of the shared debt, and it occupied a part of Limburg and Luxembourg, which were meant to come under the Netherlands. The Dutch King did not want to accept the terms, and it would take another five years to achieve a modus vivendi. The Austrian representatives were also not fully satisfied with these conditions.<sup>187</sup> Neumann conveyed that Palmerston's distrust towards Metternich had taken on a personal dimension:

I do not understand how a man of his wisdom and one so highly respected could have made such an unfortunate mistake in assessing the confidence Your Excellency demonstrated to him on this occasion. He should have foreseen the regrettable effect it would have on the Principal Secretary of State's opinion, which I had formed in this report; it was the subject of his envy, and he completely succeeded – but I do not see what advantage could result from this manoeuvre.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Neumann to Metternich, London, 15 February 1833, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 201.

<sup>186</sup> The problematic situation in which the current British cabinet found itself also limited Palmerston's ability to manoeuvre regarding the settlement between Belgium and the Netherlands. He also avoided discussing specific strategic issues with the British cabinet, possibly to protect his political position. This is evident in the correspondence between Neumann and Esterházy. Esterházy to Metternich, 15 March 1833, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 201.

<sup>187</sup> Grey to Lieven, East Sheen, 1 January 1833, STRANGE, vol. II, p. 434.

<sup>188</sup> Neumann to Metternich, London, 14 July 1833, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 202.

The present circumstances provide only a partial resolution, while more significant issues in international politics have relegated the previous problem to a secondary position.

The political situation in Europe changed noticeably between 1833 and 1838. The division between the Western and Eastern Powers deepened considerably. Palmerston's approach to international issues reflected the revolutions that shook almost the entire Continent in the 1830s, the Eastern Question, and problems within British politics. During this period, Belgium took advantage of Amsterdam's intransigence. The British Foreign Secretary remained in diplomatic contact with King Leopold I for the entire period, and his territory became an integral part of the liberal bloc in Europe. The British government supported Brussels in fortifying the eastern border against Prussia. Over this entire period, Russia did not even receive Belgian consuls.<sup>189</sup>

March 1838 saw an unexpected change to the situation when the Dutch envoy in London submitted a request to the British Foreign Secretary asking for the re-opening of the London Conference.<sup>190</sup> His proposal also included acceptance of the conditions stated in the 1831 treaty.<sup>191</sup> This was William I requesting something he had previously adamantly rejected. He mainly aimed to return Limburg and Luxembourg under Dutch control through diplomatic means. This request led to an outcry among the Belgians. According to Leopold I, William I could not request the conditions submitted seven years ago – a new proposal needed to be created. France's government and the public supported Leopold in this regard. Palmerston took a position similar to the one in previous years. He made every effort to limit the advantages gained by France through Belgian support while simultaneously advocating for conditions most favourable to his own government. According to him, keeping the borders as proposed in the 1831 treaty was essential, but he remained open to changes if both parties agreed to them.<sup>192</sup> The Conference was once again plunged into long diplomatic negotiations.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> ŠEDIVÝ, Miroslav, *Crisis Among the Great Powers. The Concert of Europe and the Eastern Question*, London 2017, p. 189.

<sup>190</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 20 March 1838, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 220.

<sup>191</sup> This step was preceded by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of Commerce and Navigation of 1837. Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Her Majesty, and the King of the Netherlands (27 October 1837) in: Esterházy to Metternich, Vienna, 11 February 1837, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 220.

<sup>192</sup> BROWN, David, *Lord Palmerston and Parliamentary Representation 1830–1865*. In: 57th Conference of the ICHRPI: Representative and Parliamentary Institutions from Middle Age to Present Times 2010, p. 49.

<sup>193</sup> BELL, vol. I, p. 222.

The delegations of the different Powers had also changed. Matuszewicz was replaced in London by Carlo Andrea Pozzo di Borgo. Ludwig Senfft von Pilsach took Wessenberg's place at the conference. Former Foreign Minister Sébastiani took part in discussions for France. Van de Weyer again defended Brussels' position. It was clear from the outset that the prevailing situation was beneficial to Belgium. Leopold I desired nothing more than to gain control of Luxembourg and Limburg. In these circumstances, the Belgians launched a fierce campaign against the British government, specifically targeting Palmerston. Leopold I visited France and attempted to secure its support. The Foreign Secretary kept a cool head again and remained indifferent to France's positions, which were hostile to his politics, and acquired an unexpected ally in the form of Van de Weyer, who ignored the instructions of his government.<sup>194</sup> In the short term, his opposition to Austria had notably diminished.<sup>195</sup>

The issue of the shared debt became the primary focus, with the Belgians not having even begun to repay it. Van de Weyer rejected the first proposal that Belgium pay the sum of 8,400,000 florins annually, i.e., the sum required in the 15 November 1831 treaty.<sup>196</sup> In its negotiations, Brussels once again relied on the renowned *Syndicat d'Amortissement* and demanded that the Netherlands disclose the full accounts of this authority. Palmerston, on the other hand, did not want to delay the signing of the treaty, especially at a time when the situation in the Near East had again begun to heat up, and so he dismissed this demand outright. Although *Syndicat d'Amortissement* was not mentioned in the final treaty, Belgium was imposed with an annual repayment of 5,000,000 florins.<sup>197</sup>

Another issue was to resolve merchant fees on the River Scheldt. Pressured by Palmerston, the Dutch agreed to a rate of one and a half florins per ton of cargo, which had been part of the 1833 proposal.<sup>198</sup> The British Foreign Secretary secured agreement with the provisions from the Eastern Powers and had a favourable position in negotiations with France.<sup>199</sup> Émile Desages, a leading figure

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<sup>194</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 517.

<sup>195</sup> Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 25 June 1838 (second dispatch), AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 219.

<sup>196</sup> Treaty Between Great Britain, Austria, France, Prussia and Russia, and Belgium, Relative to the Separation of Belgium from Holland, *British and Foreign State Papers 1830–1831*, vol. XVIII, p. 656.

<sup>197</sup> BUCHAN, John, *The Kingdom of Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg*, London 1923, p. 54.

<sup>198</sup> Palmerston also considered British trade interests in discussions, which is why British vessels paid the same fees as Belgian vessels.

<sup>199</sup> Esterházy to Metternich, London, 1 December 1838, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 221.

in French politics, went to London to agree on a joint stance. Following several meetings with Palmerston and Melbourne, he concluded that all the provisions agreed upon at the conference should be adopted. Despite Leopold I's efforts to modify some arrangements to his advantage, it became clear that he had no leverage. The last of his attempts was to get British public opinion on his side. One of the letters he sent to Palmerston states:

Eight years have strengthened the young plant beyond what its most sanguine well-wishers could have expected, and now it is to be sacrificed without pity, to considerations of most secondary importance for the other states concerned. The Dutch have but little interest in the greater part of the territories. The Prussians wish to get rid of our neighbourhood, but if they do not change their system, they will themselves be their worst enemies. Let me, for the last time, appeal to England to consider how far its mediation can take care of the rights and interests of the other states without ruining our future prospects.<sup>200</sup>

It is doubtful whether this emotive message made any actual impact.

Palmerston based his reply on the claim of the British government that it was forced to negotiate based on a fair assessment of law, and it could not act in any other way in this matter. He added that the territory requested by Belgium was part of another state according to international agreements, and Great Britain intended to respect these agreements.<sup>201</sup> Yet, if the Belgian sovereign were to reject these provisions, it would be dangerous not just for Belgium but for the whole of Europe. In conclusion, he added that Brussels had received significant concessions, both in debt repayment with the total sum reduced to a third of the original value and regarding the Scheldt, where the Belgians had got everything they requested.<sup>202</sup> Palmerston's reply was effective, and Leopold had no choice but to concur.<sup>203</sup>

The treaty itself was signed on 19 April 1839, the result of almost nine years of negotiation. The establishment of Belgium had required two armed interventions, which invoked the threat of continent-wide war.<sup>204</sup> Palmerston undoubtedly played a crucial role in the affair.<sup>205</sup> For the history of Benelux and Europe, the core outcome was a neutral statute guaranteed by the Powers.<sup>206</sup> In this matter, it was

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<sup>200</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 519.

<sup>201</sup> Hummelauer to Metternich, London, 13 April 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 222.

<sup>202</sup> Hummelauer to Metternich, London, 11 May 1839, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 222.

<sup>203</sup> WEBSTER, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston*, vol. I, p. 520.

<sup>204</sup> COLBY, p. 70.

<sup>205</sup> BROWN, David, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy 1846–1855*, Southampton 1998, p. 328.

<sup>206</sup> VANDERBOSCH, p. 56.

clearly a step towards preserving the balance of power. The idea of the Great Powers cooperating based on mutual understanding and compromise proved somewhat outdated, revealing significant, and to some extent, insurmountable, differences between them. The Belgian-Dutch dispute soon became a proxy conflict, with the two Maritime Powers facing off against the three Continental ones. This tension was further fuelled by Anglo-French suspicion. Palmerston sought to maintain close ties with France while closely monitoring and sometimes directly challenging its policies whenever they threatened British interests. The Belgian-Dutch conflict, therefore, was more than just a regional issue; it highlighted a complex diplomatic landscape where Austria promoted their legal interpretations and international principles. In this context, Palmerston began to see the three Eastern courts as direct opponents to his foreign policy, which focused on advancing the interests of the United Kingdom. Palmerston's interest in Belgium was not about purely supporting liberal desires, but rather, the interests of the new state overlapped with British policy on the Continent. In pursuing national objectives, Palmerston was prepared to sacrifice his declared non-intervention policy and the co-operation of all five Powers.

For Metternich, on the other hand, the issues surrounding Belgium were of secondary importance. During the conference, more significant foreign policy problems arose, whether on the Italian Peninsula, in the German Confederation, the Near East, or along Austria's borders during the Polish uprising. Metternich often viewed the Belgian question within a broader diplomatic context rather than as an isolated issue. He was rightly convinced that French policy in the Italian region directly impacted the negotiations over Belgium.<sup>207</sup> Another significant shift occurred after the withdrawal of Russian representatives from the conference, as the burden of the negotiations fell primarily on Prussia and Austria, which aimed to counter British-French cooperation in advancing the interests of the Belgian king. Still, Metternich did not see the post-revolutionary arrangement of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands as merely favouring a conservative monarch and his political direction. Instead, his perspective was rooted in the interpretation of law, legitimate claims, and the maintenance of the balance of power. He believed that shaping Belgium according to the French model would threaten the security of the German Confederation. While Palmerston advocated for Belgian neutrality as a means to protect Britain from potential French expansion, Metternich's policy was driven by the same principle. Yet, Palmerston's re-

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<sup>207</sup> Metternich to Wessenberg, Vienna, 21 March 1832, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StAbt, England 200.

luctance to collaborate with Austria and the remaining Eastern courts hindered the potential for closer cooperation. Moreover, the meetings in the British capital had demonstrated a growing rift between the Eastern and Western Powers, which was beginning to accelerate. Austria and Great Britain stood on opposite sides of the barricade in this struggle.