

Instructions from Paul-Henri Spaak to E. de Cartier de Marchienne (7 June 1945)

Caption: In this note, Paul-Henri Spaak, Belgian Foreign Minister, informs Émile de Cartier de Marchienne, Belgian Ambassador to London, of the principles and the conditions relating to Belgium's participation in the Allied military occupation of Germany.

Source: DE VOS, Luc; ROOMS, Etienne; DELOGE, Pascal; STERKENDRIES, Jean-Michel (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques belges 1941-1960, De l'indépendance à l'interdépendance. Tome II: Défense 1941-1960. Bruxelles: Académie royale de Belgique, 1998. 582 p. ISBN 90-6569-670-9. p. 135-136.

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Belgium's participation in the military occupation of Germany (7 June 1945)

The cessation of hostilities has made the issue of our participation in the occupation of Germany all the more urgent, not least because the French and British Governments have been negotiating the borders of their respective occupation zones. The issue is considered below with particular regard to the principle of Belgium's participation, the size of the zone that we are requesting and the occupation arrangements.

1. The principle

The principle of Belgium's participation in the occupation of Germany will not be a source of contention. Nevertheless, it would be useful, for the shaping of our policy, to recall the main reasons behind it.

(a) Politically speaking, and for our cooperation with the Allies, it is important for Belgium to play a tangible role in controlling the vanquished enemy. In that regard, this declaration is necessary. Our long-term security requires that we occupy, militarily, a sizeable buffer zone on our eastern border.

Belgium's participation in the occupation is the best way to give weight to our demands concerning the fate of Germany, which, in the first instance, will be settled by the Allied Control Committee. Lastly, our participation could have a deterrent effect by discouraging other powers from establishing a military presence on our eastern border.

(b) From the economic viewpoint, we want to occupy militarily the region that can provide us with certain commodities needed for our recovery, such as pit timber from the Eifel, coal from Aachen coalfield and electricity from the Erft dam.

Furthermore, we want to maintain a de facto control over the communication routes that run between Belgium and the Rhineland-Westphalia basin and our ports, which could be used as export outlets.

2. The size of the zone

In the light of the preceding considerations, the zone that would best suit our national interests would be bordered on the north by a line running from Venlo to Duisburg, including the road between the two cities; on the east by the Rhine from Duisburg to Kinzig, or by a parallel line along the river's right bank; to the south by the Ahr River (the attribution of the valley road is not necessary), and then a line running south of the Gerolstein-Prüm-Sankt Vith road so as to link up with the intersection of the Belgian, Luxembourg and German borders.

The attached map shows that this region is, in fact, an eastern extension of Belgium, with which it is linked via many communication routes. It forms a protective defence to the east and encompasses regions that have key communication links and are of economic interest to us.

3. (a) We would occupy, at least at the outset, a sector of the British zone. Accordingly, we would no longer be on an equal legal footing with the major occupying forces, as we were after the First World War. It is not necessary to review here the differences between the two situations. Suffice it to say that this arrangement would be the only way for us to participate in the occupation, unless we were to occupy a sector of the French zone. However, our political and military relations with Great Britain would induce us to prefer the first solution. None the less, it would have the drawback, perhaps temporary, of placing us in a subordinate position.

The commander of the Belgian occupation troops would be under the authority of the commander of the British zone, who would convey to us the orders and instructions issued by the Allied Control Council. However, we would have to insist on the possibility of direct relations being established between our government and our occupation troops.

(b) As things stand, we do not have the numerical strength required to occupy the entire zone that we are

requesting. However, this consideration should not prevent us from submitting our most ambitious claims without delay. Belgium would effectively occupy the zone that, in theory, will be assigned to it as soon as our military units are fully established in the forthcoming months. The project involves three divisions of three brigades each, totalling around 45 000 men, which would not constitute a disproportionate effort for our country and would, for the most part, meet the demands of occupation. The Belgian units could, as they are established, replace British units, and the fact that they would be under British command would facilitate the operation.