

FWO â€“ â€”Research Grantâ€”™ for research about the civic purge

The Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) has given Dirk Luyten (CegeSoma) a research grant for research into the civic purge after the Second World War in the judicial district of Brussels. The civic purge, better known as the 'list of the military prosecutor', was a key element of punishment of collaboration after the Second World War in Belgium. It was aimed at less grave and mainly political collaboration. Due to this measure, over 20,000 people lost their political and civil rights.

Little research has been carried out about this phenomenon so far, although it is a very interesting one for various reasons. The military prosecutor could revoke rights without interference of the military tribunal, but opposition to his decision was possible. In this case, the court of first instance was competent for rendering a judgement and thereby served as a contact point between the military justice system and the 'common' judicial powers.

The present research project focusses on these contacts and on the judicial protagonists: how did military prosecutors, judges and lawyers use this new tool? Which influence did the civil judicial powers have on the manner in which the military prosecutor acted? How did he use this new tool?

Case study Brussels

The project bears on the judicial district of Brussels. This district has a variety of characteristics (Dutch and French-speaking population, city and countryside) which allows for research into how the tool was used with regard to Flemish and French-speaking collaboration movements and whether or not it was applied to specifically target local collaboration phenomena. As the actors of the judicial system take a central role, the focus is on cases in which the decisions of the military prosecutor are opposed.

A corpus of sources

The sources that will be used for this research project were produced by two different archive creators: the court of first instance and the office of the military prosecutor. Both were directly linked by the judgements, which will be digitised at the State Archives in Forest/Vorst. The digitisation of these documents has two purposes: analysing the juridical arguments put forward, and having a tool to make a representative selection of the most relevant case files of the office of the military prosecutor. Digitisation of these files will take place at the National Archives 2 - Joseph Cuvelier repository.

This corpus of sources forms the basis for the research. By combining them with other archives, such as the Instructions g n rales of the chief military prosecutor, we gain better insight into the mode of operation of the civic purge and the attitude of the different juridical protagonists, especially the military prosecutors, and into the internal corrective mechanisms of the judiciary.

Digitisation will be carried out by job students who are employed thanks to the research grant. For standards and metadata, the internal rules of the State Archives are applied, complemented by metadata to answer specific research questions. In order to enable international comparisons, there are contacts with an ongoing project of the digitisation of files produced in the context of the post-war purges in the Netherlands.

The present project is not only of importance for the scientific valorisation of the archives of the military justice system, transferred to the State Archives, it also contributes ? although modestly - to solving the issue of permanent conservation of this kind of very fragile archive documents. Furthermore, the project provides opportunities for cooperation between different repositories of the State Archives.