

# Belgians and security issues : a trend analysis (1970-1990)<sup>1</sup>

---

by Philippe MANIGART,

Chair in Social Sciences of the Royal Military Academy of Belgium,

and Eric MARLIER,

Eurobarometer, Commission of the European Communities.

## I. Introduction

The goal of this article is to study, in a quantitative way, how security/defense issues have been perceived in Belgium since the early 1970s. This period has been characterized by breathtaking changes in the political and military world environment<sup>2</sup>. At the end of the 70s, Belgium, as other European countries, was agitated by the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) issue. Then Gorbachev came to power in the USSR and launched his "New thinking" program, which led to revolutionary changes in the East and the unification of Germany. The CFE talks, begun in Vienna, led to the signature in Paris, in November 1990, of a treaty formally ending the Cold War. Then, just when there was hope for a "peace dividend", Iraq invaded Kuwait, reminding us that the end of East-West tensions does not necessarily mean "the end of history", as some had perhaps prematurely thought. Finally<sup>3</sup>, on December 15 1990, the Heads of States and Governments of the 12 E.C. countries decided to study the possibility of a common European defense and foreign policy.

The end of the East-West conflict and the emergence of new security threats have rendered old security arrangements largely obsolete. Although elite manoeuvre room is probably greater in the security domain than in other political domains,<sup>4</sup> security policy in the recent years has been increasingly the object of

---

(1) We are grateful to Dr. Karlheinz Reif, director of the unit "Surveys, Research, Analyses" of the Commission of the EEC, for having provided us with the results of Eurobarometers and to the U.S. Information Agency for its permission to use some of its data. We also wish to thank the Zentrum für Europäische Umfrageanalysen und Studien (Mannheim, Germany) for its kind cooperation. The data analyzed here are available from the Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung (Köln, Germany).

(2) See for example P.J. BYRD, *The re-emergence of defence as a political issue*. In D.W. URWIN, W.E. PATERSON (eds), *Politics in Western Europe Today: Perspectives, Policies and Problems Since 1980*. London, 1990, pp. 85-113.

(3) The article was written before the Gulf War broke out.

(4) As an empirical evidence, see for example P. MANIGART, *Distribution et nature de l'influence dans la politique belge de défense dans les années 1980*. In : *Res Publica*, 1987, n° 1, pp. 31-52.

public scrutiny and controversies. In this context, the study of public opinions on security issues is of particular relevance. As Dalton <sup>5</sup> rightly notes, "the public's view generally defines the acceptable bounds of politics, within which political elites can resolve the remaining controversies."

## II. The data base

The study consists in a secondary analysis of Belgian public opinion surveys covering the last 20 years. As far as Belgium is concerned, the only data base that allows for trend analysis is the series of *Eurobarometer* surveys (EB). These are conducted on behalf of the unit "Surveys, Research, Analyses" of the *Commission of the European Communities* each spring and autumn since autumn of 1973. They consist of an identical set of questions put to representative samples of the population aged fifteen and over in each country. The use of approximately the same sampling design, field periods and sizes across countries <sup>6</sup> minimizes sampling variability and thus ensures a relatively good reliability, often a problem with secondary analysis of trend data <sup>7</sup>.

The main goal of the Eurobarometer series is to measure the "European mood" and to follow its changes. Among the EB surveys' topics are several questions about Europe's defense, the great causes which nowadays are worth the trouble of defending, NATO, level of defense expenditures, patriotic feelings, etc. Most of these questions however are not suitable for trend analysis because asked only once. In this paper, we will mainly concentrate on the questions that have been asked at least twice during the period covered (1970-1990).

The initial step in this secondary analysis of Belgian public opinion data was to identify all the questions dealing with security issues (in a broad sense) that were ever asked in the *Eurobarometer* surveys series since 1973. In the 34 surveys, 151 such questions were found. From these 151 questions, a database was constructed. It gives for each question the following information: the name of the variable, the year the question was asked, the Eurobarometer number, the question number, the general theme of the question, its content, the exact wording of the question (in English), and whether it is a trend variable or not. In a second

---

(5) R.J. DALTON, *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies: Public Opinion and Political Parties in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany and France*. Chatham, 1988.

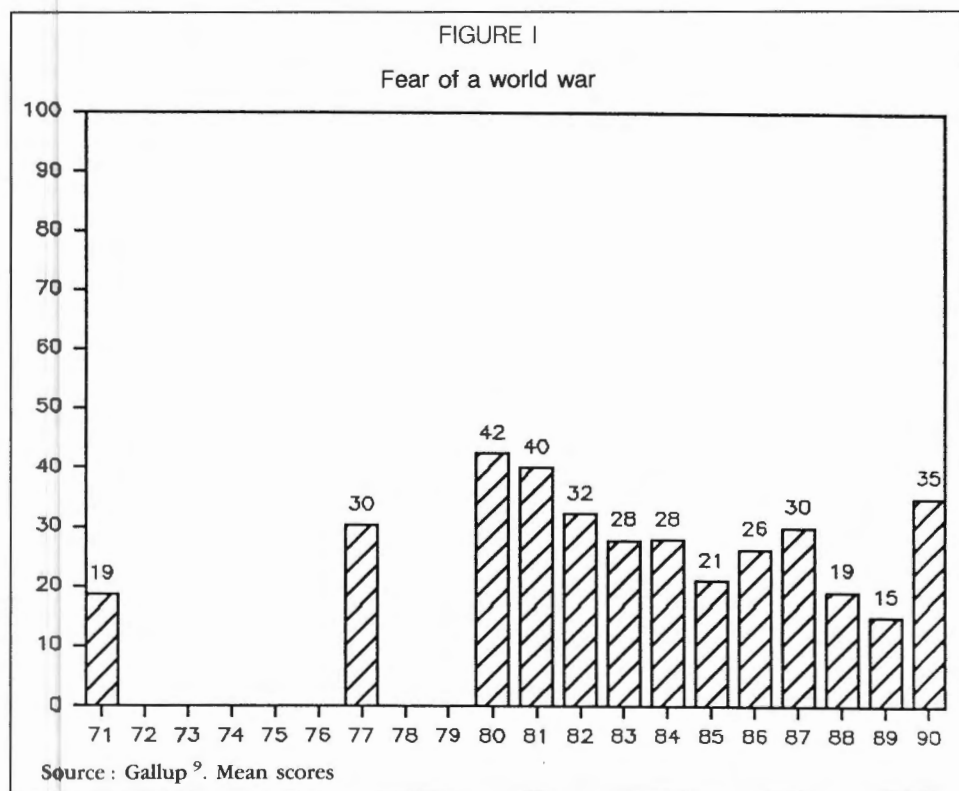
(6) The Belgian samples consist of approximately 1000 respondents each. For more details on the sampling methods used and sample characteristics, see Eurobarometers 1 through 33. See also what we call Eurobarometer 0 (Autumn 73).

(7) See N.D. GLENN, Problems of comparability in trend studies with opinion poll data. In: *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Spring 1970, pp. 82-91, and K.J. KIECOLT, L.E. NATHAN, *Secondary Analysis of Survey Data*. Sage University Paper series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences, n° 07-001. London, 1985.

step, the national and standard demographic crosstabulations for these variables were collected<sup>8</sup>. This paper presents an analysis of some of these variables.

### III. Findings

#### A. Fears of a major war



As figure I clearly shows, public perceptions on the risk of war are largely related to the international situation. So, after a dramatic drop between 1987 and 1989 of the perceived danger of a world war, largely due to the removal of the Iron Curtain, the Gulf crisis caused an upsurge of fear among the Belgian public. While in 1989, Belgians thought it was highly unlikely that a world war would break out

(8) The database as well as these crosstabulations are available from the Department of Social Sciences of the Royal Military Academy.

(9) We wish to thank Dimarso-Gallup Belgium (member of E.O.S. Gallup Europe) for having made available to us the November 1990 results.

in the next 10 years <sup>10</sup>, in November 1990 <sup>11</sup>, the fear of war was again almost as high as in the early 80s, in the worst days of East-West tensions.

The early 70s saw the heyday of traditional military *detente*. In 1971, the mean score was 19, i.e. very low. Then, a series of events - Afghanistan, the Soviet buildup of SS-20s in Europe, unrest in Poland, the Reagan administration defense buildup, Nicaragua, NATO's double-track decision - revived concerns about the possibility of war. The Soviet Union was again perceived as an adventurous power and thus the fear of a major war between East and West grew significantly. In 1980, a few months after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (December 1979), the fear of a major war between East and West reached its highest level, with a mean score of 42. It then progressively declined to an absolute low in 1989 (15). Then the Gulf crisis shattered that renewed optimism. In November 1990, the mean score was up to 35.

If, through the whole period covered, the Belgian mean score has been lower than 50, it has also been always a little higher than the European mean score. For instance, in 1990, the European mean score was 31 (vs 35 for Belgium). Belgium is significantly less optimistic than the Netherlands (29) <sup>12</sup> or the ex-FRG (21). Great Britain and Ireland with a mean score of 46 and 47 respectively were the least optimistic nations.

### B. *Expectations for next year*

Respondents were also asked whether they thought that next year would or would not be a peaceful year, more or less free of international disputes <sup>13</sup>. Figure II presents the percentages of people expecting a peaceful year.

Here also, optimism among Belgian citizens dramatically dropped in November 1990. After rising by 7 points between 1987 and 1989 (from 9% to 16%), the percentage of optimists went back to 8% in 1990.

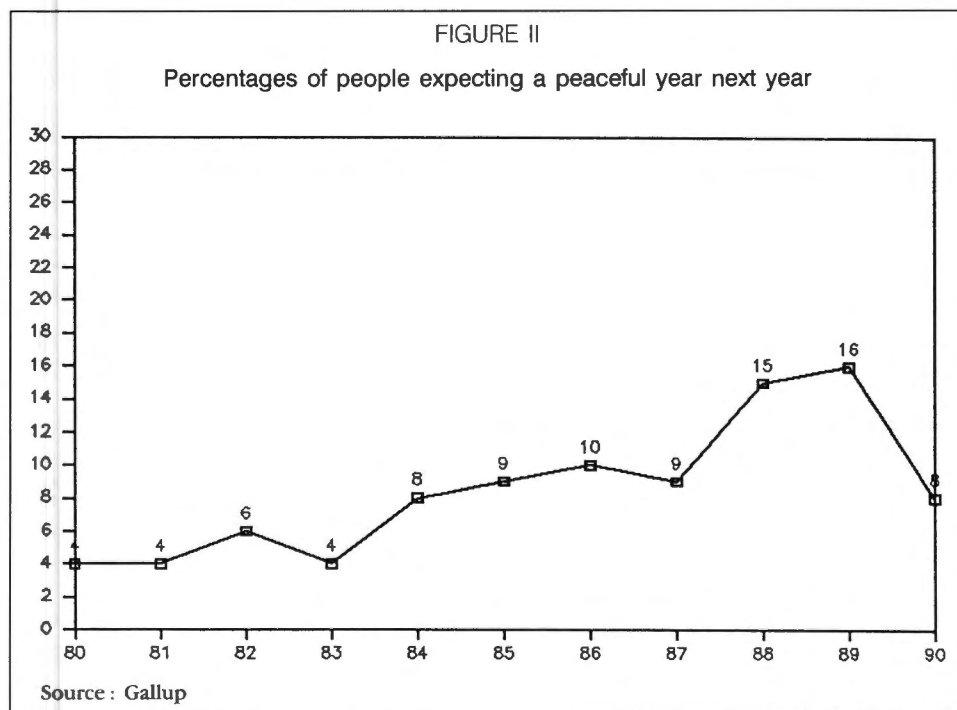
---

(10) The question wording is: "Here is a sort of scale. Would you tell me how you assess the chance of a world war breaking out in the next 10 years?". The scale goes from 0 (no danger of war) to 100 (world war certain within the next 10 years). The figure gives the mean scores.

(11) Fieldwork took place between November 11 and December 1, i.e. after the ultimatum against Iraq was voted by the Security Council.

(12) See P. EVERTS, A. FABER, *Publieke opinie en veiligheid*. In: *Jaarboek Vrede en Veiligheid 1989-90*. Nijmegen: Studiecentrum Vredesvraagstukken, 1990, pp. 136-154, and J. VAN DER MEULEN, *After the cold war: Dutch public opinion on the armed forces*. Paper presented at the second Conference of the *European Research Group on Military and Society*. Utrecht, March 28-April 1, 1990.

(13) The exact question wording is: "Looking ahead to (next year), do you think it will be a peaceful year more or less free of international disputes, a troubled year with much international discord, or remain the same?".



On a comparative level, Belgians are less optimistic than Europeans as a whole : in 1990, the percentage of Europeans who thought 1991 would be a peaceful year was 13%. In 1990, the most optimistic European citizens were the Irish (21%) and the Italians (18%). The least optimistic were the Dutch (6%) and the French (7%).

### C. Attitudes towards national defense

The traditional response to international threat is to strengthen one's national defense. So it is interesting to look at the evolution of Belgian public's attitudes towards a stronger military defense during that period<sup>14</sup> (table I) and see whether these attitudes fluctuate with their assessments of the international situation. By and large, the two attitudes seem indeed to covary (at least for the period covered, i.e. 1976-1987).

(14) Except for small differences from year to year, the question wording was: "Here is a list of problems that people of our country are more or less interested in. Could you please tell me for each one whether you personally consider it is a very important problem, important problem, fairly important, or not important at all?". Among the various items proposed was: "Strengthen our military defense against possible enemies".

TABLE I  
Importance of defense

	1976	1978	1983	1987
Very important	12 %	12 %	18 %	15 %
Important	24	24	34	29
Fairly important	22	22	28	28
Not important at all	30	26	11	18
DK/NA	12	16	9	10

Source : EB 6, 10, 20, 28

Over a period of more than 10 years pro-military feelings have increased in Belgium: the percentage of people considering that strengthening our defense against possible enemies was very important or important has gone up from 36% in 1976 to 44% in 1987. The pattern however is curvilinear.

Study after study has shown that Flemish people tend to be less pro-military than Walloons<sup>15</sup>. Our data confirm this observation: while, in 1987, 22% of Walloons thought that strengthening our defense was very important, only 11% of Flemish thought so (and 14% of inhabitants of Brussels).

If Belgian attitudes are compared to European ones, the trends appear to be quite similar: it increases up to 1983 and then drops. However, for the whole period, the percentage of people who think that strengthening our defense against possible enemies is very important or important is systematically lower in Belgium than in the Community as a whole. For example, in 1987, the percentage reached 57% in the E.C. versus 44% in Belgium. One other difference between Belgium and the E.C. is that the growing trend between 1976 and 1983 was much steeper in Belgium than in the E.C. In the E.C. as a whole, the percentages of people considering defense was very important or important went from 56% in 1976 to 61% in 1983 and 57% in 1987.

The older Europeans are, the more they think stronger defense is important: in 1987, 54% of Europeans aged 15-24 thought it was important or very important, versus 66% for those aged 55 or more. But, pro-military orientations go down with educational level and income. Not surprisingly, the more on the left one is, the less pro-military one is: 40% of Europeans with far-left political views considered

(15) See, for instance, P.M.G. LEVY, *Les Belges et la défense du pays (sondage et analyse)*. In: *Communications au Colloque: La Belgique vue par la sociologie. Tome 1*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Groupe de sociologie Wallonne. Collection Dossier Wallon Levy, 1979, pp. 41-58; P. MANIGART, *Civil-military relations in Belgium: military and civilian opinions about security-related issues*. In: R. ZOLL (ed.), *Public Opinion on Security Policy and Armed Forces: Analyses and Data From Eight Countries*. Munchen: SOWI (Forum International, vol. 1, 1982), pp. 145-163; R. REZSOHAZY, J. KERKHOFS (eds), *L'univers des Belges: valeurs anciennes et valeurs nouvelles dans les années 80*. Louvain-la-Neuve, 1984.

defense was important or very important against 75% of those on the far-right. There is no statistically significant difference according to sex.

TABLE II  
Importance of defense as a cause worth fighting for <sup>16</sup>

Year	% of people choosing defense	Relative place
1982	13 %	8/10
1987	16	9/11
1988	27	8/11

Source : EB 17, 28, 30

Table II confirms the rising pro-military trend observed in table I. A growing number of Belgians (up from 13% in 1982 to 27% in 1987) say that defense of their country is a cause worth fighting for. Nevertheless, defense still gets low priority (8th item cited over 11).

Older Belgians tend to be more numerous in thinking Belgium's defense is a cause worth fighting for, than younger people : 33% among people in their mid-fifties and over versus 26% and 23% among those aged 15-24 and 25-39 respectively. As was the case with the preceding question, pro-military sentiments vary according to political attitudes (leftists are less pro-military) and with educational level (the more educated, the less pro-military). But these differences are quite small. If one compares Belgian attitudes with European ones, one observes that defense has a lower priority in Belgium than in the Community as a whole (defense occupied the 6th position in the E.C. in 1987).

Two related questions (but without trend) were also asked to respondents : one in 1984 (Eurobarometer 21), the other in 1985 (Eurobarometer 24). In 1984, people were asked how much they agreed with the statement "One should be ready to sacrifice oneself for one's country". Only 19% of the Belgian public broadly or completely agreed, 28% just about agreed, 47% disagreed completely or to some extent and 6% did not know. Here again, the percentage of people who agreed was much lower in Belgium than in the E.C. (19% vs 28%). Nevertheless, the percentage of disagreement was quite the same : 47% for Belgium, 46% for the E.C.

In 1985, interviewees had to answer the following question : "Of course, we all hope that there will not be another war, but if it were to come to that would you be willing to fight for your country?". Only 36% of the Belgian public answered yes (51% of the Europeans), 52% no (34% in the E.C.), and 12% did not know

(16) Except for slight changes from year to year, the question was : "Which of the ideas or causes in the following list are sufficiently important for you to do something about, even if this might involve giving up other things?". The respondents were shown a list of about 10 possible causes. Among the items was "our country's defense" (the list of items varied to some extent from year to year); they could choose several items.

(15% in the E.C.). Although the percentages of Belgians willing to fight for their country in case of war is somewhat higher than the percentage of Belgians willing to make sacrifices for their country, it is still well below the 50%. As table III indicates, this percentage vary with age, sex, educational level, income, and political attitudes.

TABLE III  
Willingness of Belgians to fight for their country

Age		Age they left school		Sex	Income	Political orientations	
15-24	41%	15 or less	36%	M 38%	-- 28%	Left	32%
25-39	39	16-19	34	F 34	- 32	Center	40
40-54	33	20 or more	40		+ 43	Right	35
55 or more	31				++ 40		

Source : EB 24

Contrary to what one could have expected, the younger one is, the more willing one is to fight for Belgium. Better educated and more affluent people are also more willing to fight for Belgium than less educated and less affluent ones. The relationship between political orientations and willingness to fight is no more linear (as it was the case for the preceding question), but curvilinear.

Another question dealt with national goals<sup>17</sup>. What is particularly interesting about this question is that the trend goes back to 1973. Table IV presents the results for Belgium.

TABLE IV  
Importance of a strong defense

	1973	1978	1979	1988
Most important thing	2 %	3 %	3 %	6 %
2nd most important thing	5	4	4	8

Source : EB 0, 10, 11, 29

Once again, pro-military feelings appear to have increased during the period studied. That is, in 1988, there were proportionally a few more people in Belgium who thought defense was the most important national goal (6%) than in 1973 (2%). One should note however that, although this represents a threefold increase, the growth is too small (4%) to be really statistically significant. If one now looks at the percentage of respondents who chose defense as their first or second choice,

(17) The question was: "There is a lot of talk these days about what the aims of our country should be for the next 10 years. On this card, are listed some of the goals which different people would give top priority. Would you please say which of these, you, yourself, consider the most important? And which would be the next most important?". Among the four items was "Making sure that our country has strong defense forces".



the trend is more significant : one goes from 7% in 1973 to 14% in 1988. The increase occurred between 1979 and 1988.

However, notwithstanding the small increase in pro-military sentiments among the Belgian public, one should not forget that the proportion of Belgians thinking defense is an important national goal, is very low, lower than in the E.C.: in 1988, 20% of the Europeans chose defense as their first or second choice. Contrary to the Belgian figures, the Europeans ones display no trend at all. Thus, as in the trend of table I, Belgian and European opinions seem to become more similar. This movement is rather due to a shift in Belgian public attitudes than to a shift in European ones.

The next question (table V) is very similar to the preceding one. The main difference is that it asks the goals which are considered as "desirable" <sup>18</sup> rather than "important".

TABLE V  
Desirability of a strong defense

	1973	1978	1988
Most desirable	1 %	0 %	2 %
Second most desirable	1	2	2
Least desirable	60	46	36

Source : EB 0, 10, 29

For the whole period, very few Belgians (4% in 1988) think defense is the most or second most desirable goal. As usual, it is lower than in the E.C. (6% in 1988). While belief in strong defense has remained quite constant in Belgium, the proportion of people saying that "strong defense" is the least desirable goal has dropped from 60% in 1973 to 36 % in 1988. It is now closer to the European average (31% in 1988).

#### D. *Opinions about defense expenditures*

A related issue concerns the appropriate level of military expenditures. The only indication of this in the Eurobarometer series is a 1984 question on opinions about the reduction of military expenditures <sup>19</sup>.

(18) The question was worded as follows : "Could you tell me which of the following goals you think is the most desirable of all? And which is the next most desirable? And which one of all the aims is least important from your point of view?". Among the 12 items was "Strong defense".

(19) The exact question wording was : "I will now ask your opinion on a number of items. Will you please, for each item, select on this list the answer which best describes your opinion?". Among the proposed items was "Military expenditures must be reduced".

TABLE VI  
Opinions about the reduction of military expenditures

	Belgium	E.C.
Disagree completely	3 %	9 %
Disagree to some extent	8	16
Agree if anything	17	16
Broadly agree	27	24
Completely agree	37	27
DK/NA	8	8

Source : EB 21

As table VI shows, a majority of Belgian and European people completely or broadly agreed with the proposition that military expenditures should be reduced (64% and 51% respectively). Once again, the proportion of pro-defense sentiments is higher among Europeans than among Belgians : only 11% of Belgians completely or somewhat disagreed compared to 25% of Europeans.

Except for age and political orientations, there are few statistically significant variations. As usual, young Belgians tended to be more anti-military : they were more favorable to a reduction in military expenditures (70% of the people aged 25-39 agreed versus 59 % of those aged 55 or more). People on the left were also more favorable to cuts in the defense budget than people on the right (70% vs 63%).

In 1989, a similar question was asked to a representative sample of Belgians aged 18 and over <sup>20</sup>. Although the wording was different, the results are broadly comparable with those of 1984. Respondents were asked if the Belgian defense budget should be increased, remain the same or be reduced. 57% of the respondents thought it should be reduced, a somewhat lower percentage than in 1984, 4% that it should be increased and 27% that it should remain the same. 12% had no opinion. Once again, French-speaking respondents were significantly more pro-military than Dutch-speaking ones : only 47% of French-speaking respondents were favorable to cuts in defense spending versus 63% of Dutch-speaking respondents.

So far, Europeans appear more defense-oriented than Belgians : they are more inclined to defend their country and to strengthen their military defense against possible enemies than the Belgians, even if, as we observed, those attitudinal differences tend to become smaller through time. What about orientations towards NATO, arms limitation or peace ? Do we observe similar trends ? One now turns to these topics.

(20) The question was asked on behalf of De Morgen by DIMARSO. See De Morgen, december 18, 1989.

E. *Opinions on NATO*

TABLE VII  
Opinions on NATO

	1980	1988	1989
Still essential	45 %	65 %	55 %
No longer essential	10	22	30
Was never essential	5	-	-
DK/NA	39	12	14

Source : EB 14, 30, 32 (USIA)

On the whole, Belgians are rather positive about NATO (table VII)<sup>21</sup>. Among those expressing an opinion, more than half think NATO is still essential. But if support for NATO has been quite high throughout the whole period, in 1989, the number of persons believing in NATO's continued essential role dropped sharply : from 74% of those who expressed an opinion in 1980 and 1988 to 64% in 1989. This decrease is surely the result of the changing international situation.

The 1989 interviews were indeed conducted during the revolutionary developments in East Germany. With the Warsaw Pact having all but disintegrated, it is quite understandable to review the role of NATO. NATO was after all founded to counter the Soviet threat. It is thus quite logical that NATO be considered less important if people believe the Soviet Union is less threatening than before. An indication of this is provided by a question on people's opinion about the USSR. In 1989, 56% of Belgians had a favorable overall opinion of the Soviet Union<sup>22</sup>.

Flemish respondents are significantly less pro-NATO than Walloons : in 1989, among those who had an opinion, 51% of Flemish people thought NATO was still essential versus 60% of Walloons. Inhabitants of Brussels were the most pro-NATO (65%).

In 1989, as far as NATO support is concerned, Belgium was slightly above the EC average (50%)<sup>23</sup>. It was in Denmark and in Great Britain that the number of respondents considering NATO still essential was the highest (68% and 67% respectively) and in Spain that it was the lowest (24%). This question on the usefulness of NATO naturally lead us to the European defense issue. This is the topic dealt with in the following section.

(21) Except for 1980 where it was asked in a slightly different way, the question was : "Some people say that NATO is still essential to (OUR COUNTRY'S) security. Other say NATO is no longer essential. Which of these views is closer to your own?" In 1980, the respondents could volunteer their own answer, beside the two proposed choices. 5 % said that NATO had never been essential. This question, attached to the standard Eurobarometer survey, was asked on behalf of USIA.

(22) Eurobarometer 32.

(23) The question was not asked in Luxemburg.

F. *Opinions about a common European defense*

TABLE VIII

Who should decide about strengthening military defense? <sup>24</sup>

Year	Separately	Together	NA/DK
1976	27%	50%	23%
1978	27	44	29
1987	22	51	27
1989	38	58	4
1990	39	53	8

Source: EB 6, 10, 28, 32, 33

Pro-European orientations concerning defense issues were at their peak (in our time-series) in 1989: 58% of the respondents thought decisions about defense should be taken by the European Community acting together. Among those who expressed an opinion, the trend is quite stable: around 60% of Belgians believed that defense policy should be decided jointly within the European Community (except in 1987, when the percentage was 70%).

As far as defense policy is concerned, Flemish people are more pro-European than Walloons. In 1990, 58% of Flemish respondents thought that security and defense should be decided jointly within the E.C. versus 53% of Brussels inhabitants and only 44% of Walloons. This is a further indicator of the fact that Walloons tend to be more nationalistic than Flemish people.

Differences between Belgian and European opinions are negligible: in 1990, the percentage of Europeans thinking defense policy should be decided at the European level was 48%. The most nationalist in matter of defense were the Irish (70% thought it should remain a national matter) and the Greeks (68%); the least nationalists were the Luxemburgers (27%) and the Dutch (33%).

In the perspective of "1992" and at a time of revived discussions about European unity, it is interesting to analyze what the Belgian and European citizens think about the creation of a collective European organization for defense. A question on this topic was asked in Autumn 1988 (table IX):

"Are you in favor of going even further than the Single Common European Market towards the unification of Europe? (Yes or no) (IF YES), in which directions mainly? (SEVERAL RESPONSES POSSIBLE)

- 1) A collective organization for defence
- 2) A collective economic and social policy, particularly in the area of employment
- 3) A single European currency, the ECU

(24) The question wording has differed over the years. So a rigorous comparison is not possible. Between 1976 and 1987, the item was "Strengthen our military defense against possible enemies". In 1989 and 1990, one asked only about "security, defense".

- 4) A single common foreign policy for relationship with the countries outside the EC
- 5) A reinforced common regional policy, particularly for the regions in economic and social difficulties
- 6) Other (specify)"

TABLE IX  
Areas of cooperation in a united Europe

	Belgium	E.C.
Defense policy	46 %	44 %
Economic and social policy	61	64
European currency	62	46
Foreign policy	40	37
Regional policy	33	41
Other	3	2

Source : EB 30

In 1988, 46% of Belgians (versus 44% of Europeans) were in favor of creating a collective European organization for defense. The differences between Belgians and Europeans were negligible.

Defense however was not the highest priority, neither for Belgians, nor Europeans. It came third for both. For Belgians, the highest priority was the European currency (62%) and for Europeans economic and social policy (64%).

So a large majority of Belgians and Europeans support the creation of a common European defense organization. But which institution should become the most important forum for making decisions about security in Western Europe in the future : NATO, the EC, the West European Union or another organization ? (see table X) <sup>25</sup>

(25) The question was : "In your opinion, should NATO continue to be the most important forum for making decisions about the security of Western Europe in the future, or should the European Community make these decisions, or should some other organization make these decisions ?" Question not asked in Luxemburg ; in France, one spoke about "Atlantic Alliance" instead of "NATO".

TABLE X  
Best forum for making decisions about West European security

	Belgium	E.C.
NATO	36 %	30 %
E.C.	33	36
W.E.U.	5	5
Other organizations	5	3
Nobody, we should make our own decisions (spontaneous)	8	7
DK/NA	13	19

Source : EB 32 (USIA)

Belgian and European publics are almost equally divided between those who think NATO should remain the most important place for deciding about the security of Western Europe (Belgians : 36%; EC : 30%) and those who believe the E.C. should supersede or replace NATO (Belgians : 33%; EC : 36%). Very few people cited the West European Union (Belgium and EC : 5%), probably because it is a low profile institution for most Europeans. Danes and Germans were the most pro-NATO (60% and 45% respectively), while Greeks were the most pro-E.C (49%) and the most anti-NATO (8%).

### G. Orientations towards arms limitation

Popular concerns about the arms race spawned an active peace movement over all in Europe in the early 80s<sup>26</sup>. Thousands of Belgians demonstrated against the stationing of new nuclear weapons in Western Europe. These groups represented a growing popular doubt that armaments were the road to national security. These sentiments can be clearly seen in table XI, which gives the answers of Belgians and Europeans to a question on the importance of arms limitation asked in March-April 1989<sup>27</sup>.

(26) See W. KALTEFLEITER, R. PFALTZGRAFF (eds), *The Peace Movements in Europe and the United States*. London, 1985.

(27) The question was : "I should like to hear your views on some political issues and problems. Could you please tell me for each issue or problem whether you consider it to be very important or not very important?". Among the proposed items was "Arms limitation". The results of this question have been made available by Herman Schmitt (Mannheim) of the European Election Study 1989 (EES 89). EES 89 is an international research project directed by a group of five researchers : R. Cayrol, Paris ; C. van der Eijk, Amsterdam ; M. Franklin, Strathclyde ; M. Kuechler, New York ; and H. Schmitt, Mannheim.

TABLE XI  
European and Belgian opinions about arms limitation

	Belgium	E.C.
Very important	73 %	85 %
Not very important	22	13
DK/NA	5	2

Source : EB 31a

73% of Belgians thought arms limitation was a very important issue (versus 85% in the E.C.) while 22% thought it was not very important (versus 13% in the E.C.)<sup>28</sup>. Belgians are thus not only less defense-oriented, but also less interested in arms limitation. This is an interesting and quite unexpected finding. One might have inferred that Belgians would attach more importance to arms limitation because they are less pro-defense. This is not the case, as the data show. It means that being anti-military is not a sufficient condition for being supporter of arms limitation (or vice versa). As one will see below, this observation remains valid for opinions about world peace and peace movements. One possible explanation to these somewhat counter-intuitive findings could be that Belgians are simply less concerned by security issues in a broad sense and more interested in domestic, bread and butter issues.

The opinion that arms limitation is an important issue is widely shared among the Belgian public. One observes few variations across the standard socio-demographic variables. One will just cite the fact that the youngest and the best educated (at least in terms of years of schooling) were among those who thought arms limitation is important.

As already noted, in Belgium, as far as security matters are concerned, one variable has usually a greater impact than the standard socio-demographic variables : it is the linguistic or regional variable. Dutch-speaking persons tend to be less pro-military (or more peace-oriented) than French-speaking ones. A further illustration of this can be provided by a question on an issue that divided European public opinion and political elites in the early 1980s : the deployment of missiles in Europe<sup>29</sup>. In answer to a question on whether they were for or against deployment of missiles in Europe, both in the East as in the West, and whether they would accept this deployment on Belgian territory, Dutch- and French-speaking respondents showed greatly differing opinions. French-speaking respondents were sig-

(28) The same question had also been asked in October-November 1988. The results were the same, within the bounds of sampling error : 72 % of the Belgian sample thought it was important vs 83 % of the Europeans ; 26 % thought it was not very important (vs. 15 %).

(29) Source : Sobemap, October 1981. Cited in L. DE SMET, *Belgian public opinion in the security debate, 1979-1985*. Paper presented at the First Biennial Conference of the European Research Group on Military and Society, Vienna, March 19-22, 1988, p. 18.

nificantly more favorable to deployment in Belgium than Dutch-speaking ones (12% against 5%), although approval was still low.

#### H. *Orientations towards peace issues*

The following questions deal with the peace issue. Table XII shows the evolution, between 1982 and 1988, of the percentages of people believing world peace is a cause worth fighting for<sup>30</sup>.

TABLE XII  
Importance of peace as a cause worth fighting for

Year	% of people choosing world peace	Relative place
1982	65 %	1/10
1987	60	1/11
1988	69	1/11

Source: EB 17, 28, 30

During the whole period covered, a high proportion of Belgians (around 65%) thought peace is a cause worth taking risks for. But contrary to the other topics reviewed, there is no clear trend. Similarly, throughout the whole period, in terms of relative place, peace has remained top of the list<sup>31</sup>. In the E.C. as a whole, the most popular item was also peace, with percentages varying between 67% in 1982 and 75% in 1988. It thus appears to be one of the cause with the greatest support among the European public.

If one now turns to the opinions of Belgians on peace movements<sup>32</sup>, one interesting result is the evolution of the proportion of "no answers" (table XIII), significantly decreasing between 1982 and 1986, both in Belgium (from 18 to 5%) and the EC (from 12 to 7%). One explanation is surely the massive media coverage of the "Euromissiles" debate.

(30) Except for slight differences from year to year, the question was: "In your opinion, in this list, which are the great causes which nowadays are worth the trouble of taking risks and making sacrifices for?". Among the items was "world peace".

(31) Among the other items were "defense of one's country", "freedom of the individual", "human rights",...

(32) The question was: "There are a number of groups and movements seeking the support of the public. For each of the following movements, can you tell me whether you approve or you disapprove?". Among the proposed items was "anti-war and anti-nuclear weapons movements".



TABLE XIII  
Opinions about peace movements

	1982		1986	
	Belgium	E.C.	Belgium	E.C.
Approve	66 %	63%	75%	72%
Disapprove	16	25	20	21
DK/NA	18	12	5	7

Source: EB 17, 25

Another observation is that approval of peace movements was high: both in Belgium and the E.C., 2 respondents out of 3 in 1982 and 3 out of 4 in 1986 had a positive opinion. Although the number of persons approving anti-nuclear weapons movements seems to be increasing over the years (from 66% to 75%), when only considering people who had an opinion, percentages appear to remain stable: in 1982, 80% of Belgians who expressed an opinion approved the activities of peace movements, versus 79% in 1986. In the E.C. as a whole, the approval was equally massive (72% and 77% of those who expressed an opinion respectively).

TABLE XIV  
Partisans of peace movements, by socio-demographic variables

Age		Age they left school		Political orientations	
15-24	57 %	15 or less	66 %	Left	74 %
25-39	66	16-19	68	Center	66
40-54	70	20 or more	73	Right	64
55 or more	74				

Source: EB 25

Surprisingly, approval of peace movements among Belgians was increasing with age, while in the EC as a whole, it was sharply decreasing (from 72% among people aged 15-24 to 56% among the oldest age group). As expected however, it also increased among those with more years of education and greater leanings to the left (table XIV).

Belgium and the E.C. as a whole show largely similar levels of approval and an identical increase of 9 points. For the level of disapproval however, the trends were dissimilar: it was going up in Belgium and down in the E.C., meaning that differences between Belgium and the E.C. tend to disappear. One will also note that the growth of the peace movement's popularity, both in Belgium and in the E.C., coincided with a small decrease of the fears for a world war: on a scale from 1 (no risk within the next 10 years) to 100 (war is certain), the mean went from 32 in 1982 to 26 in 1986 (and from 30 to 24 in the E.C.) (cf. figure I).

Did this massive approval of peace movements translate itself into active support for specific organizations? Put otherwise, were the people approving the goals of

peace movements also ready to become active members of these organizations, or were they already militants? This is the last topic one will investigate in this paper.

TABLE XV  
Opinions about joining peace movements

	1982	1986
Is a member	1 %	1 %
Might join	11	4
Would not join	59	69
DK/NA	29	26

Source: EB 17, 25

As table XV shows, if approval of peace movements in general was massive, the percentage of Belgians who were members of or planned to join a peace movement was extremely small<sup>33</sup>: only 1% of the respondents were members of a peace movement in 1982 and 1986. This very low and stable proportion was to be expected. From the now classic works of Olson, Oberschall and Tilly,<sup>34</sup> among others, one can indeed predict that, because of the costs of collective action and the fact that peace is a collective or public good, membership in peace movements should be low.

The number of people who might join has been decreasing. At first, such a result is surprising because the peace movement's popularity was increasing at the same time. The explanation lies perhaps in the specific periods during which the question was asked: 1982 marked the mid-point of the Euromissiles debate. The anti-missile mobilization was high. It was the time of big demonstrations all over Europe. In such a context, one can understand that more persons had considered the possibility of joining the peace movement. By contrast, in 1986, mobilization was low, the two superpowers had agreed to dismantle their medium-range missiles, so the incentive to join the peace movement was smaller, even though more people had by then become convinced of the peace movement's goals.

(33) The exact question wording was: "There are a number of groups and movements seeking the support of the public. For each of the following movements, can you tell me whether you are a member or might probably join or would certainly not join?". Among the proposed items was "anti-war and anti-nuclear weapons movements".

(34) M. OLSON, *The Logic of Collective Action*. Cambridge, 1971; A. OBERSCHALL, *Social Conflict and Social Movements*. Englewood Cliffs, 1973; and C. TILLY, *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, 1978.

#### IV. Conclusions

The evidence reviewed in this article about Belgians and security issues is mixed. On the one hand, their orientations towards peace movements and arms limitations are more positive than before.

On the other hand, many other indicators point simultaneously to an increase in pro-defense orientations (although the proportion is lower than in the E.C. as a whole). This is a bit surprising: one could have thought that if Belgians became more favorable to arms limitations and the peace movement in the 80s, they would consequently become less defense-oriented. This is not the case, as the data show. It means that, as said above, becoming more favorable to arms limitation or the peace movement does not necessarily mean becoming less pro-military (or vice versa).

As for "Europe 1992", Belgians and other Europeans are overwhelmingly favorable to the creation of a collective organization for defense. It is one of many indicators of the decline of nationalism, in Belgium and in Europe<sup>35</sup>. This does not mean however that NATO is no longer essential or that the E.C should supplant or replace NATO as the most important forum for making decisions about the security of Western Europe. While pro-NATO feelings are on the wane, Belgians still considered, in 1989, NATO to be important for their security.

Finally, on a comparative level, most of the trend data point to a growing similarity of opinions between Belgium and the E.C. as a whole. If in the 70s, there were almost systematically great differences of opinions between Belgians and Europeans concerning security issues, at the present time, the differences tend to be smaller. One explanation, to be tested in a future paper, could be that the increasing trend toward European integration at the economic and institutional levels has an homogenizing effect on the attitudes of Europeans, so that one could more and more speak of an "European public". Future research might show whether national public opinions in the 12 E.C. countries, and not only Belgian public opinion, have become more convergent.

#### **Summary: Belgians and security issues**

*This article attempts to assess, in a quantitative way, how security/defense issues have been perceived in Belgium since the early 1970s among the mass public. This period has been characterized by breathtaking changes in the political and*

---

(35) For empirical evidences of this decline, see for instance R. INGLEHART, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton, 1990; S. HARDING, D. PHILLIPS, *Contrasting Values in Western Europe*. London, 1986; P. MANIGART, E. MARLIER, *Value change and its impact on orientations towards security policy in Belgium*. Paper presented at the second Conference of the European Research Group on Military and Society. Utrecht, March 28-April 1, 1990; and J. STOETZEL, *Les valeurs du temps présent: une enquête européenne*. Paris, 1983.

*military world environment. How have Belgians reacted to these changes? The empirical evidence is based on a secondary analysis of public opinion data from the Eurobarometer series.*

*The picture that emerges from the trend analysis is mixed. On the one hand, orientations towards the peace movement and arms limitations are more positive than before. On the other hand, many other indicators point to an increase in pro-defense orientations. Belgians are also overwhelmingly favorable to the creation of a collective organization for defense.*