The private security industry in Antwerp (1907-1934). A historical-criminological analysis of its modus operandi and growth

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Cet article présente une analyse de l’industrie de la sécurité privée à Anvers entre 1907 et 1934, au point de vue de son développement, de sa structure et de ses activités. L’émergence d’une forme marchande de police est replacée dans le contexte de développements politiques, socio-économiques et criminologiques en Belgique. Nous nous attardons particulièrement sur deux compagnies qui ont jeté les bases de l’industrie belge moderne de la sécurité, Waak en Sluit et Garde Maritime & Commerciale, tout en présentant certaines comparaisons avec d’autres services de police privés (inter)nationaux.

In this contribution the nature of the private security industry in the city of Antwerp between 1907 and 1934 will be analysed, with regards to its growth, structure and activities. This emergence of profit-oriented policing is further researched within the framework of political, socio-economic and criminological developments in Belgium. Our focus rests mostly upon two companies which formed the foundation of the modern security industry in Belgium, Waak en Sluit and the Garde Maritime & Commerciale, although they are to a certain extent compared to other (inter)national private policing services.

INTRODUCTION

A lthough academic interest in private security and policing has increased significantly in the last few decades, it is only recently that consensus has evolved on the changes that policing and crime control in Western industrialised countries have gone through. Most scholars attribute significant shifts in the delivery, practice and orientation of policing and crime control to the development of new professions in security, and to the substantial expansion of private sector security services in particular. In what today is a burgeoning security industry, the

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2 Jones, Newburn (2002).

3 Hoste, Enhus (2004); Cools, Verbeiren (2004); McLaughlin (2007).
tens of thousands of private security personnel greatly outnumber police forces in several Western nations⁴, and private agencies have become important suppliers of visible surveillance, order maintenance, investigation and information-brokering.⁵ Some interpret these changes by claiming that we are entering a new era in which one system, that of public policing, has ended and another has taken its place.⁶ These developments are undeniable and are quite obviously present in Belgium as well. The interpretation, however, should be considered with some caution. Do the changes in contemporary crime control actually constitute a radical – or at least a substantial – break with the past, and is the analysis, largely based on Anglo-Saxon developments, universally applicable to the Belgian situation? Setting these changes in a historical perspective and teasing out enduring motifs in crime control might reveal a longer-term pattern of multiple policing providers and security markets, as well as greater intertwinement of public and private policing than acknowledged by those proclaiming the arrival of a new epoch.⁷

While at an international level the history of private policing has been the subject of a growing amount of criminological and historical studies,⁸ there is no comprehensive research on the topic in Belgium. This is surprising, given the longstanding debates in Belgium on reassigning core police tasks to the security industry, the so-called ‘Kerntakendebat’, and the widely discussed erosion of the boundaries between the public and private sector. This article attempts to shed light on the growth, activities and organisation of the private security industry in Belgium in general, and the city of Antwerp in particular, between 1907 and 1934. The aim is, on the one hand, to analyse the nature of the security industry as it was in the first third of the twentieth century and, on the other hand, to understand the underlying historical mechanisms that shaped the development of this security market. As the following sections on the Antwerp security industry will make clear, we might need to reframe our understanding of the contemporary trend towards privatising policing, since these transformations are the outcome of a longer historical process that began in the early twentieth century. In this respect Antwerp is an interesting case, being the city where Belgium’s first official private security company in was established in 1907.⁹ We have selected the year 1934 as the finishing point for this study, as this is the year the Belgian government adopted its first legislation on private security, the 29 July 1934 ‘Law Prohibiting Private Militias’.

In general the private security sector can be divided into two branches: the provision of security-guard services and private detective agencies. Though research on private investigation shows it played a significant role in the development of the modern and pre-modern Anglo-Saxon criminal justice and police system,¹⁰ in Belgium, however, private detective agencies only had a marginal influence on this overall historical development.¹¹ As a result, we will be focusing exclusively on

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⁴ Button (2002).
⁵ McLaughlin (2007).
⁹ Leloup (2014).
¹⁰ Johnston (1992, pp. 9-12); Beattie (2012).
¹¹ Van Outrive et al. (1992); Denys (2010).
the security industry and its companies, employing privately paid watchmen and mobile guards. Through intensive archival research, we have come up with new insights shedding light on the growth and activities of the first private-sector security companies, *Waak en Sluit* and the *Garde Maritime & Commerciale*. Given the lack of historical-criminological research on the private security industry in Belgium, our case study is only a first exploration of the dynamics of its historical development and its activities and *modus operandi*. However, by offering certain insights into the early twentieth century roots of Belgian private security, its practices and its position in security and policing networks, this analysis can contribute to ongoing debates in criminology and history about shifts in crime control, private and public policing relations, plural policing practices and about criticism of the state monopolisation thesis.

In this article, we therefore begin by presenting the reader with an introduction to and discussion of some of the key concepts and claims in this area of research, before demonstrating the need for historical reflection. We then move on to explore the private security industry in Antwerp, describing its origins and examining in detail the structure and activities of two of the first private security companies in Belgium. In the final sections, we attempt to outline some fundamental political, socio-economic and socio-cultural trends, in which issues related to crime and crime control have enhanced privatised responses to security threats. Also, we investigate the interface between the state police and the private companies discussed, questioning in particular the latter’s policing powers. We wind up with a general conclusion.

**THE CONCEPT OF PRIVATE SECURITY**

Even today, while in several Western industrialised societies private security guards outnumber their public colleagues, the concept of privatised security still arouses mixed emotions. While the dichotomous thinking in terms of ‘public’ and ‘private’ has repeatedly been criticized, the analytical classification is still widely used in the majority of scientific works on security provision and policing. The notion of ‘public’ refers to the tax-financed provision of collective services by the state. In the private sector, on the other hand, profit-seeking enterprises target a select group of paying customers. In summary, private security refers to “the process whereby individuals and agencies (be they governments or corporations) make use of the age-old prerogative of self-help to protect their belongings and persons”.

If the existing literature on security and policing teaches us one thing, it is that the history of – and interface between – public and private policing are quite complex, and repeatedly debated in both academic and political circles. Looking for instance at works of Hobbes, Smith and Marx, security and policing were seen primarily as

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12 See e.g. Loader (1997); Neocleous (2007).
13 For an overview of these debates see for example Johnston (1992); Jones, Newburn (1998); Button (2002).
14 Shearing, Stenning (1982, p. 3).
examples of public welfare. Yet, throughout history security provision was never monopolized by the state alone, even in the supposed heydays of public policing, characterised by the institutionalisation of the modern police apparatus in the second half of the nineteenth century. Before this, there was little distinction between public and private forms of policing. As part of the then state-building process and subsequent professionalization of the governance of crime control, a public-private discrepancy gained greater relevance in the field of maintaining public order. This transition towards more state-controlled law enforcement strengthened the incorrect assumption of an “unprecedented public dominion over crime control”, as Churchill argues. Actually, a wide and complex range of public and private bodies dealing with crime existed throughout the nineteenth century, countering an often assumed central conception in criminal justice history: the state monopolisation thesis.

Even so, a number of leading criminologists tend to interpret the recent growth of the private security sector as a radical shift from a public to a plural policing model. An ingrained ahistorical approach to criminological studies on private policing explains why many contemporary insights on the subject fail to provide a theoretical and empirical long-term explanatory basis. In this respect, the contemporary shift in crime control towards privatisation is often primarily interpreted as a relatively recent development, signalling further decline in state control. Thus, although frequently seen differently, it is rather the ‘new police’ and “not the modern phenomena of agencies within the private security sector that are out of step with the historical lineage of policing forms”. To a certain degree, the lack of empirical data and material on the subject might be responsible. In our case, for example, no direct archival records were found on either Waak en Sluit or Garde Maritime & Commerciale. Painstaking archival research in organisations indirectly involved in (private) policing and security – e.g. the Chamber of Commerce, maritime and business interest parties, the Antwerp authorities, etc. – was needed to collect and analyse data on private security companies. Despite this inevitable methodological issue, this contribution challenges the alleged historical discontinuity in private initiatives within the sector of surveillance and the protection of goods and people. In addition, we reveal the explanatory value of the historical perspective for providing a better understanding of present-day policing governance. In this respect, we argue that overlooking historical patterns of policing generates, and even more importantly, reaffirms the above-mentioned misconceptions of present-day shifts in security provision and the perceived myth of the state’s policing monopoly. To do this, we will examine the actual extent to which private security agencies have operated alongside the regular police since the early twentieth century in Belgium.

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17 Williams (2008).
20 See e.g. Bayley, Shearing (1996).
21 South (1987, p. 72).
At the beginning of the twentieth century the Belgian city of Antwerp, capital of the same-named province, had almost 300,000 inhabitants. Parallel to its considerable demographic growth – since 1850 the number of inhabitants had nearly tripled – and the city’s spatial expansion, industrial, business and maritime activities increased significantly, making it one of the country’s largest urbanised and industrialised cities. The specific nature of the city and its port located on the banks of the Scheldt – in terms of infrastructural size the second largest in the world around 1900 – resulted in a complex set of dynamics and developments on multiple levels: social, political, economic, cultural and criminological. But while similar socio-cultural transformations affected many modern Western European cities between 1880 and 1914 – the steady rise of a wealthy middle class, a flourishing nightlife, the growth of conspicuous consumption etc., the proximity of a port also led to particular changes in cities like Antwerp. Immigration and the presence of vast numbers of low-paid dockworkers promoted the rise of specific urban districts and ghettos. Secondly, as we will show below, the port itself produced vast flows of people and goods, and consequently profitable criminal opportunities. And thirdly, politics and other societal domains were to a large extent dominated by a network of elite merchants with extensive business links to the port of Antwerp.

These specific urban and industrial characteristics and developments forced the Antwerp authorities to develop hands-on strategies for social control and order maintenance throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In doing so, they were mainly dependent on municipal police forces and the Antwerp ‘Burgerwacht’ or civic guard. Since the creation of the Belgian state this force was publically and politically controversial and not very well trained. It proved ineffective, and, until the end of the First World War, was mostly called upon to put down organised strikes in the city and port of Antwerp. During that time, perceptions of crime and its control were changing significantly, in line with the transforming nature of society in political and socio-economic conditions. In an era of considerable industrial development, a rapidly increasing working class fuelled moral panic among members of the social elite, bringing about a tendency towards morally and physically controlling the ‘classes dangereuses’ such as beggars, prostitutes, alcoholics and foreigners. In response to the needs of a modern and rapidly changing political, social and economic environment, the Belgian government favoured the idea of a professional national police force. As far as the local police forces in such larger cities as Antwerp were concerned, efforts were made to specialise, unify and modernise them.

Until then, the local city police had suffered from serious qualitative and quantitative shortcomings, which forced them, among other things, to cooperate with private and hybrid auxiliary policing bodies. In order, for example, to supervise

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22 Leysen, Boehme (2009, p. 10).
24 Loyen (2008a, p. 11).
27 Keunings (1988); Van Outrive et al. (1992, p. 47); Keunings et al. (2004); Denys (2010).
markets, parades and public celebrations like carnival processions, and to maintain public order at both day and night, cities often appealed to low-paid watchmen and fire brigades. However, the modernisation and professionalisation of the municipal police saw this patchwork of policing services slowly disappearing, with most of the auxiliary forces, among them local urban night-watch services, being incorporated into regular police units. This modernisation strategy was not surprising: the local police found itself increasingly confronted with new public order challenges, including major increase in traffic, overcrowded neighbourhoods, forms of anti-social behaviour and a better-armed, professional and mobile criminal underworld.

As part of this modernisation, a port police unit, a criminal investigation department and a vice squad were added to the local police force in Antwerp, bringing its numbers up to 835 police officers in 1910. Notwithstanding the process of gradually merging auxiliary police services into the public law enforcement agencies, privatised forms of policing never completely disappeared, with various players remaining active in the security market. Nonetheless, as discussed below, a new, modern private security industry started to emerge in the early twentieth century. In 1910, for example, the city of Antwerp already counted 439 night watchmen, the majority employed by the night watch service Waak en Sluit. In comparison to their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors, when night-watches consisted mostly of unskilled workers, these security companies reflected the professional characteristics of the public police in terms of their hierarchical organisation, strict recruitment of personnel (at least in theory), the use of uniforms and to some degree their policing activities, but differed from it in their accountability, commercial interests and the absence of any legal framework. In this respect, the private security industry aroused new questions about responsibility for maintaining public order and the nature and objects of policing itself.

THE ‘WAAK EN SLUIT’ PRIVATE NIGHT WATCH SERVICE

Origin and background

The Belgian Waak en Sluit night watch service was established in 1907 as a subsidiary of the Kölner Wach- und Schließgesellschaft (KWS), copying its classic German hierarchical and military characteristics. KWS founder Benno Koßmann had incorporated KWS in Cologne on 1 December 1901. Only six months earlier, on 15 July 1901, the first night watch service in Germany and even Europe had been founded in Hanover by a German businessman: the Hannoversches Wach- und Schließinstitut (HWS), later named Niedersächsischen Wach- und Schließgesellschaft, modelled on US private security firms, and in particular the Pinkerton National Detective

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31 Van Outrive et al. (1992, p. 76).
32 Keunings (2009, p. 66).
34 Shearing, Stenning (1987, p. 10).
Agency. Apart from providing detective services, the latter included a night-watch division, established in Chicago in 1858 as the Protective Police Patrol. This private policing body offered urban night protection in Chicago for commercial enterprises such as banks, offices and stores. During the 1880s, it was however primarily used as a strike-breaking force in the hands of industrial employers, a practice that will be briefly discussed later in this article. The idea of a uniformed and paid guard service to prevent crime at night certainly proved successful in Germany and the rest of Europe, as witnessed by the considerable rise in the number of private security companies between 1901 and 1904. The plethora of initially similar night watch services were united under the umbrella of the Kölner Verband in 1904. A year later the Kölner Wach- und Schließgesellschaften provided forms of private security in almost fifty cities throughout Germany and Europe, including Hamburg, Frankfurt, Berlin, Dresden, Prague and Vienna. By 1906 KWS already employed more than 1500 security guards.

It is quite remarkable how the security industry began to develop in neighbouring countries in the early twentieth century. For example in the Netherlands, where in 1902 the first private night watch service, the Gecontroleerde Particuliere Nachteveiligheid, whose organisation and structure were based on the German Wach- und Schließgesellschaften, was established in Amsterdam by Isaac Beuth. In France, the widespread perception of lack of safety and security in the suburbs – which was to a certain degree fuelled by the press and public fascination by sensational criminal cases, – led to the creation of several private security services in 1907, that paved the way for a booming industry until the outbreak of the First World War. Somewhat later, Belgium’s modern-day private security industry emerged near the city centre of Antwerp with the founding of Waak en Sluit on 1 March 1907. One year later, on 22 March 1908, a similar firm started up in Brussels under the name of La Ronde de Nuit, and both companies joined the Internationaler Verband der Wach- und Schließgesellschaften in 1910. Nevertheless, as we have to point out, private and local night watches were of course no exclusive phenomenon of the second half of the Belle Époque. Instead, predecessors date back as far as ancient times and the nocturnal practice continued to exist throughout history, one famous example being De Nachtwacht or The Night Watch, immortalized by Rembrandt van Rijn in 1642. In Belgium by the end of the nineteenth century, for example, there existed other private night watches, but most of them were quite unsuccessful, disappeared after a few years and had no significant influence on future developments in policing.
Just eighteen months after its establishment, the newspaper *L’Étoile belge* reported on 30 August 1908 that *Waak en Sluit* had more than 2000 customers. While both *Waak en Sluit* and *La Ronde de Nuit* successfully expanded their private policing activities during their early years, things changed from August 1914 onwards. Although precise data on *Waak en Sluit* are scarce due to a lack of historical sources, the logical conclusion must be that the outbreak of the First World War disrupted everyday operations. In Germany, for example, private firms associated to the KWS – and we have good reason to believe this was the case in Belgium too – suffered from a lack of personnel. Nevertheless, private KWS-watchmen in Germany could be found guarding vital locations such as factories, water, gas and electricity corporations and arms depots. In Belgium, by contrast, security activities contracted from *La Ronde de Nuit* and probably *Waak en Sluit* too were put on hold, at least at the beginning of the war. In Brussels, the director of *La Ronde de Nuit* informed the German head office as early as October 1914 that the company was completely shut down on account of the ongoing military activities, though, according to Keunings, it was back operating in January 1915. Comparable developments also took place in Paris, according to Ocqueteau, where night-watch services practically ceased to exist until the end of the war, although this is disputed by Kalifa. Nevertheless, private local night-watch initiatives emerged between 1914 and 1918, though differing in their nature and goals from the commercial enterprises discussed in this article. In essence, the German-occupied Belgian mainland was policed, alongside the German forces, by remaining municipal police officers and agents – usually older men – and temporary local night watches and civic guards. Their tasks included the enforcement of wartime regulations on food supplies, the search for subversive elements and deserters trying to escape military service and front-line duty. With regard to the incipient Belgian private security industry itself, things were slightly different. Research, for example, has revealed that business activity in Belgium declined more than half during the war. This financial and economic crisis undoubtedly affected and reduced the purchasing power of even wealthier citizens, merchants and industrial magnates, i.e. the socio-economic groups the private security sector depended on. In this respect, it is not surprising that even at times when property crime and feelings of insecurity increased, a large number of *Waak en Sluit* contracts were probably cancelled, although new empirical data might prove otherwise. We know, however, that the company resumed operations after the war, continuing until 1956, when the guard division was taken over by the later-discussed *Garde Maritime & Commerciale*.

However, societal shifts during the interwar period almost saw the early end of private security firms in Belgium. As a result of international developments, existing

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49 Nelken (1926, p. 112).
50 Nelken (1926, p. 105).
political tension between left- and right-wing extremist movements increased to such a level that they threatened public order. Violent and even fatal confrontations between fascist and communist militias forced the government to take legislative action prohibiting private militias. With the passing of the bill on 29 July 1934, the first private security legislation was adopted. The Law Prohibiting Private Militias, recast in 1936, also applied to the Belgian private security industry, up to then operating in a legal vacuum. Due to the strict regulations applying to uniformed and armed organisations, the continued existence of private, in this case commercial, security firms became an issue. It took a Royal Decree, initiated by the Ministry of the Interior, to exempt uniformed non-political groups working for profit (e.g. Waak en Sluit, La Ronde de Nuit, Garde Maritime & Commerciale, etc.) from being affected by this Law.

Activities and organisation

In its early years, the company’s main activities were described in the commercial register (Handelsregister) as “various security services”.\(^{55}\) This rather vague description became more explicit in the light of the objectives stated in the Belgian official journal (Belgisch Staatsblad): “The company’s main objective is the provision of daytime and night-time security services regarding movable and immovable property in the city and province of Antwerp, and all commercial and financial operations related directly or indirectly to these services”.\(^ {56}\) Although the objectives refer to “de jour et de nuit”, Waak en Sluit was primarily a night watch service. The provision of stationary or foot patrol guards outside the regular hours (10:00 p.m. till 5:00 or 6:00 a.m.) was only allowed in a small number of exceptional cases.\(^ {57}\) In a detailed catalogue the company, besides firmly stating “We never sleep!”,\(^ {58}\) declared that the main tasks consisted of securing property at night against burglary, theft, (water) damage and fire, and ensuring that stored goods were not stolen or damaged.\(^ {59}\) Private night-watch services provided by the Cologne association covered a wide range of activities (Table 1), stretching from mere crime and loss prevention – locking unlocked doors and windows, removing keys from doors, chasing off and capturing burglars and other uninvited guests – to providing first aid in case of an accident, inspecting water pipes and shut-off valves, putting out lights and candles, etc.

Routine patrols constituted the most regular security activity. Similar to the patrolling done by police officers or agents, the private watchman patrolled his assigned district at night, though with the major exception that his policing was limited to private and commercial situation, i.e., exclusively on behalf of paying customers. Nonetheless, when coming across any person in need on the street he

\(^{55}\) RAB, Commercial register Antwerpen 2004 A, No. 10210, f. 9082.

\(^{56}\) Attachments Belgian official journal, 18 and 19 March 1907, act. 1296, p. 1033: “La société a pour objet la surveillance de jour et de nuit de toutes propriétés mobilières et immobilières situées en Anvers, ou dans la province d’Anvers et toutes les opérations commerciales et financières se rattachent directement ou indirectement à des affaires de ce genre”.

\(^{57}\) Maatschappij van bewaking ‘Waak en Sluit’ (1910, p. 8).

\(^{58}\) Notice the similarity with Pinkerton’s “The eye that never sleeps”.

\(^{59}\) Maatschappij van bewaking ‘Waak en Sluit’ (1910, p. 4).
was obliged to provide first aid, a skill taught during training.Waak en Sluit divided the city into a number of easy-to-patrol districts, each under the hierarchical control of a supervisor and a few watchmen, the latter initially patrolling on foot, later by bicycle. This mere ‘scarecrow function’ of uniformed watchmen walking the beat, regardless of whether they had a public or private remit, was at that time thought sufficient to prevent crime. In addition, private night-watch services provided customers with enamel membership signs as a deterrent to potential criminals, a practice adopted from the Pinkerton Agency. Visibly mounted next to clients’ doors, the words “Société de Surveillance Waak en Sluit” or “Bewaking-Surveillance Waak en Sluit” were supposed to act as much as a deterrent as today’s CCTV or “Beware of dogs” signs.

Table 1. Interventions of the Kölner Wach- und Schließgesellschaft (25th October 1905 – 10th October 1906)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Number of interventions</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open gas taps found</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fires extinguished</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire warnings</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracked water pipes found</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First aid interventions</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>0,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglars etc. captured</td>
<td>831</td>
<td>0,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open water pipes closed</td>
<td>1.273</td>
<td>0,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglars etc. chased away</td>
<td>1.383</td>
<td>0,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost and found objects</td>
<td>1.518</td>
<td>0,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance in arrest of suspects</td>
<td>1.958</td>
<td>0,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed homeless people from houses</td>
<td>4.649</td>
<td>0,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys found on doors</td>
<td>4.846</td>
<td>0,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open factories and warehouses found</td>
<td>8739</td>
<td>1,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses rescued from dangerous situations</td>
<td>8.933</td>
<td>1,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open windows closed</td>
<td>18.038</td>
<td>3,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extinguished lights</td>
<td>32.844</td>
<td>5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opened closed doors for residents</td>
<td>116.887</td>
<td>19,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open doors closed</td>
<td>384.447</td>
<td>65,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>587.660</td>
<td>100,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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60 Ibiden.
63 Maatschappij van bewaking ‘Waak en Sluit’ (1910, p. 29).
Security guards were forbidden to heed neighbouring premises. Neighbours were cautioned in no uncertain terms that the security company was “not concerned with public security like the police”, but instead provided surveillance and protection exclusively to paying customers. Indeed, the company clearly emphasised its commercial background when stating its most substantial difference to the public police: its accountability. Instead of providing security to society in general, private firms such as *Waak en Sluit* delivered guard services exclusively to those able or willing to pay. Proactive instead of reactive intervention and protection of client property thus became two of the most specific features of modern private security companies, or as Shearing and Stenning both noted: “While the preventive role of the public police is almost universally referred to in terms of ‘crime prevention’, private security typically refer to their preventative role as one of ‘loss prevention’, thereby acknowledging that their principal concern is the protection of their clients’ assets”.

In other words, the preventive focus of the private security industry directed its actions not so much upon breaches of the law, but rather to the opportunities for such breaches.

The private security industry was constantly looking for new opportunities to expand business. Taking this commercial point of view into account surely marked a shift between contemporary private night-watch services and former night watches. Even so, in general the activities of both systems remained more or less comparable. While watchmen had previously sounded the alarm in cases of certain dangers or fire hazards threatening the wood-built neighbourhoods of pre-modern cities, activities of night-watch services at the onset of the twentieth century had evolved towards the prevention of dangerous urban situations in a broader security sense, though of course strictly limited to their clients’ premises. As a result of the previously mentioned security issues in the port of Antwerp at the turn of the century, KWS contacted the Antwerp Chamber of Commerce 8 months before establishing their Belgian subsidiary in 1907, underlining its success in preventing crime and its excellent collaboration with the city authorities. It was obvious that KWS had studied the possibility of expanding its operations to port security, as also suggested by *Waak en Sluit* in 1910. Occasionally the intended business expansion had more of a ‘moral’ incentive, as witnessed in the Belgian university city of Leuven, where another *Waak en Sluit* department was established. At the beginning of 1914 the managing director of the private night-watch service submitted an application to the university’s vice-rector, suggesting that his watchmen should ‘supervise’ students during their pub crawls at a cost of 20 Belgian francs (Bfr.) a month. In the face of this disciplinary measure, resistance grew among students, who promptly organised a protest march demanding the resignation of the managing director and the university’s vice-rector. The application was eventually withdrawn, much to the regret of the night-watch company, as “it could have led to many other wonderful

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64 *Maatschappij van bewaking ‘Waak en Sluit’* (1910, pp. 13-14).
67 RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3688, Correspondence Kölner Wach- und Schließgesellschaft to KVKA, 16 August 1906.
tasks for the company at Leuven”. The incident was even picked up by the German tabloid *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*, referring to the company on 12 March 1914 as “Die Wach- und Schließgesellschaft als Wächterin der Moral”, the night watch service as moral guardian.

The Antwerp division proved more successful at performing other services: a variety of premises were watched over: private houses, shops, offices, factories and stockyards. While clients could always ask for additional hours of protection, regular beats started at 10:00 p.m. and ended at 05:00 a.m. in summer and 06:00 a.m. in winter. On completing a night patrol, customers were thoroughly briefed about the outcome, being informed of doors and windows left open, or even possibly of burning candles or extinguished lights that had exposed their property to the risk of fire. Two different types of guarding were offered: outside or inside the residence. Clients choosing the former option were asked to pay 2 Bfr. a month for the external inspection of each privately-owned house, 3 Bfr. for a two-door property, with 0.5 Bfr. for each additional outside door. Owners of larger properties were charged up to 20 Bfr. a month, the same price as for shops, banks, hotels, factories and other commercial or industrial buildings with only one entrance and a street-facing outside wall. Additional doors and outside walls led to higher prices. For a further security round inside the premises – which was only possible for clients with an annual subscription – customers were charged an extra 3 to 20 Bfr. a month, depending on the size and number of floors and the frequency of nocturnal security rounds. Keys to the premises could be given to *Waak en Sluit* which then, as promised to their clients, “carefully secured the delivered keys” in their main office when security staff no longer needed them after their foot patrol. Due to the costs involved in the private protection of property and life, it is needless to say that many security contracts concerned the nocturnal safeguarding of shops, museums, art galleries, banks, offices and industrial sites, alongside the homes of the well-to-do. In Brussels, *La Ronde de Nuit* also protected foreign embassies. Compared to the industrial policing by the Pinkerton Agency on behalf of corporations, no direct historical evidence is found of the use of *Waak en Sluit*-guards as privately owned strike-breakers. The company did however offer factory owners protection of their property, underlining the “advantages compared to in-house security guards”.

With regard to the modus operandi, organisation and use of emblems and uniforms, *Waak en Sluit* adopted the well-known militaristic, hierarchical and bureaucratic model of the Wach- und Schließgesellschaft, itself based on the dominant structural characteristics of the German (i.e. Prussian) public police model. Beneath the

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69 Nelken (1926, p. 471): “noch viele andere schöne Aufgaben hätte man für die Loewener Schließgesellschaft finden können”.

70 Nelken (1926, p. 470).

71 *Maatschappij van bewaking ‘Waak en Sluit’* (1910, p. 9).

72 To give some context to these prices: in some industries in Belgium around 1900, average wages for labourers were sometimes as low as 10 Bfr. per week. An average of approximately 85% of their income was spent on nourishment; Scholliers (1981, p. 288); Deneckere (2006, p. 23).

73 *Maatschappij van bewaking ‘Waak en Sluit’* (1910, pp. 30-31).

74 *Maatschappij van bewaking ‘Waak en Sluit’* (1910, p. 12).

75 Keunings (1982).

76 *Maatschappij van bewaking ‘Waak en Sluit’* (1910, pp. 13-14).
managing director, a team of (head)supervisors ((hoofd)toezichters) helped manage the enterprise. At the lower levels, a foreman (opziener) gave the watchmen or constables their instructions and inspected them at regular intervals during patrols. The company repeatedly stressed its professional and proficient background and working methods, mainly in an attempt to counter the negative reputation of the private security sector. In one of the commercial publications distributed by Waak en Sluit, the enterprise stated that all its staff possessed certificates of good character, had served in the military and came from a respectable background\textsuperscript{77}. From a historical and commercial point of view, there were good reasons for doing so. In general, former watchmen, private law enforcers and other private organisations policing individuals and property suffered from a bad image. As research shows, thief-takers frequently had quite an interest in the criminal economy themselves as a way of arranging their ‘legal’ business,\textsuperscript{78} while watchmen were in close touch with suspicious figures and parties because of their nocturnal policing activities. During the nineteenth century, the business of private watchmen included guiding ‘night owls’ to the local brothels, where in return they were given a small fee for their helpful but doubtful contributions – a source of income not to be underestimated.\textsuperscript{79} But most likely Waak en Sluit feared that public opinion would compare their watchmen to the infamous ‘Pinkertons’, as the Pinkerton Agency guards were called. Several incidents relating to clashes between Pinkerton security guards – many of them having a criminal record – and strikers had given the agency in the United States a bad name, even to the extent that they were called “the scum of the earth” by some.\textsuperscript{80}

THE ‘GARDE MARITIME & COMMERCIALE’ PRIVATE SECURITY COMPANY

Origin and background

The seaport of Antwerp, with its well-established trade and business circles, played a major part in the genesis of the Garde Maritime & Commerciale (GMC). The port’s specific setting concentrated vast numbers of people and goods within an urban space that was to a large extent managed by private enterprises. This gave rise to various opportunities of crime on the one hand and crime control on the other. Throughout history, the structural growth of commercial maritime sites had boosted unique port security issues and the creation of various forms of public and private ‘dock policing’ bodies.\textsuperscript{81} One example is the formation of the Thames River Police in the late 1790s by merchant and magistrate Patrick Colquhoun. This was a private police force – although later made public – set up under his authority to protect his docks and warehouses against theft and pilfering, crimes that often went

\textsuperscript{77} Maatschappij van bewaking ‘Waak en Sluit’ (1910, p. 6).
\textsuperscript{78} Spitzer, Scull (1977, p. 20); Lea (2002, p. 34).
\textsuperscript{79} Verhoog (2002).
\textsuperscript{80} Morn (1982, p. 104).
\textsuperscript{81} Emsley (2010); Tobias (1967, p. 34); Godfrey, Cox (2013, p. 106).
hand-in-hand with the growth of commercial activities\textsuperscript{82}. A century later, similar developments took place in the port of Antwerp, where the enormous rise in trading activities and the port’s infrastructure expansion since 1860 led to new organisational concerns requiring clear-cut port policies.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the loss of goods and cargo as a result of theft were still negligible and acceptable from an economic point of view\textsuperscript{83}. Wharf security was organised by several logistic corporations known as ‘natives’ or warehousing companies, e.g. Zuidnatie, Tabaknatie and Katoennatie, each responsible for a specific type of merchandise. Most of them belonged to the umbrella organisation, Bond der Vereenigde Natiën\textsuperscript{84}. Every warehouse company was responsible for the temporary storage of the goods unloaded from a ship. However, with the port’s structural expansion and the massive increase in transported merchandise towards the end of the century, these companies were no longer able to fulfil their security obligations, as witnessed by a substantial rise in theft and pilfering on the wharves and in the warehouses. As a consequence, the warehouse and shipping companies and agencies became increasingly concerned about the situation, until in the end they took on the local authorities. As early as 1888 different maritime corporations accused the Antwerp mayor Léopold De Wael of ignoring port security, stating that it was almost a “rarity to come across a police agent when strolling around the docks”.\textsuperscript{85} Over the next few decades, tensions continued to develop between port organisations and the Antwerp local authorities over crime in port area and crime control. While business companies criticized the lack of support from the municipal police, the authorities met these accusations by pointing to the companies’ own responsibility for the problem by stockpiling goods in such a visible and unprotected ways, which constituted a “constant lure for thieves”.\textsuperscript{86} In addition, Léopold De Wael placed blame on the port companies, as their in-house security services consisted mainly of older watchmen, physically incapable of deterring thieves, who in turn did not shrink from throwing the guards into the docks when caught in the act.\textsuperscript{87}

Several associations participated in finding solutions for the problems of theft in the port’s warehouses and quays. From 1888 onwards, the Bond der Vereenigde Natiën, the Antwerp Chamber of Commerce and the Antwerp authorities began negotiations about the creation of a watchmen service. Two years later the Handelswaakdienst, “a specialised watchmen service for safeguarding docks and ships in the port of Antwerp at night”\textsuperscript{88}, was established. The organisation was under control of the Antwerp local authorities, the police and the Chamber of Commerce,\textsuperscript{89} although it resembled a hybrid police service comparable to the Thames River Police.\textsuperscript{90} Though the manned guard service earned a few minor successes in

\textsuperscript{82} Lea (2002, p. 33); Filtness (2014, p. 37).
\textsuperscript{83} Asaert et al. (1993, p. 210).
\textsuperscript{84} Confederation of United Warehouse Companies.
\textsuperscript{85} AKVBG, Minute book VBG, 6 January 1888.
\textsuperscript{86} AKVBG, Minute book VBG, 20 January 1888.
\textsuperscript{87} AKVBG, Minute book VBG, 7 March 1888.
\textsuperscript{88} RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3687, Document Handelswaakdienst, 1907.
\textsuperscript{89} RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3688, report KVKA concerning Handelswaakdienst, 30 November 1905, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{90} George, Button (2004, p. 20).
preventing pilfering and plundering, the lack of (night) watchmen forced even the
director of the Handelswaakdienst to admit that “huge amounts of merchandise
remained unguarded”,\textsuperscript{91} as illustrated by the following cases of theft in 1905. In
the night of 6 June, 15 sacks of coffee beans were pilfered from the German ship
Vereinigung 50. The shipping agent, W. H. Müller & Co claimed they could only
leave their merchandise unprotected on the wharves for two days before they were
stolen\textsuperscript{92}. Due to theft, the maritime company Boutmy & Co lost two crates of milk
and two pallets of paint on 2 and 4 December 1905.\textsuperscript{93} Shipbroker Selb & Huverstuh
sent a list of goods stolen between 18 September and 20 November to the Antwerp
Chamber of Commerce. In two of their warehouses more than 28 crates containing
matches and 2 crates each of candles, lanterns, glassware, milk and cognac and 1
crate of chains were stolen.\textsuperscript{94} Between 5 August and 9 November, the Compagnie de
Transports Internationaux lost 26 sacks of wood pulp, 8 barrels of oil, 1 crate full of
iron scrap and 8 lamps from another crate\textsuperscript{95}. The wave of theft did not go unnoticed
outside the port either. The newspaper Handelsblad reported on the security issues,
writing that “Our port seems to be in the hand of thieves”.\textsuperscript{96} Alongside some minor
incidents of theft, the article also mentioned the theft of 30 tons of wheat by so-called
‘river thieves on the Scheldt’. Even the international press raised critical questions
on the matter, with the widely-read shipping newspaper The Syren and Shipping
listing several ‘delinquent ports’ worldwide, including the port of Antwerp, where
“a ship has to be most carefully watched, as petty thieving is rife”.\textsuperscript{97} Throughout this
research, hundreds of examples of port theft were discovered, while probably a great
deal of theft was not even noticed or reported to the authorities. But not everyone
was convinced of the increase in theft. A number of shipping agencies argued that
some of the missing goods that appeared to be stolen were in reality lost due to
careless processing or handling on the wharves and in the warehouses.\textsuperscript{98} Finally, this
long-term security vacuum encouraged Aloïs Laurens, with financial support from
major shipping companies and agencies, to establish the joint-stock company Garde
Maritime & Commerciale (GMC), on 18 April 1907.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{91} RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3688, Chambre de Commerce d’Anvers : Sécurité des Mar-
chandises sur les Quais. Enquête faite par le Comité Central. Rapport général du bureau, 31 March
1906, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{92} RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3688, Correspondence W. H. Müller & Co to KVKA, 24 No-
vember 1905.
\textsuperscript{93} RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3687, Correspondence Boutmy & Co to KVKA., 8 December
1905.
\textsuperscript{94} RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3687, Attachement correspondence Selb & Huverstuhl aan de
KVKA, 14 December 1905.
\textsuperscript{95} RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3688, Attachement correspondence Compagnie de Transport
Internationaux to KVKA, 13 November 1905.
\textsuperscript{96} SA, MA-HB#359, Bewakingsdienst (1905-1908), “De diefstallen aan de kaai”, Handelsblad, 15 No-
vember 1907.
\textsuperscript{97} RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3688, Delinquent ports, in : The Syren and Shipping, 20 Sep-
tember 1911.
\textsuperscript{98} RAB, KVK ANTW. 2003 (B128), No. 3687, Correspondence Von Bary & Co to KVKA, 27 Novem-
ber 1905.
\textsuperscript{99} Belgian official journal, 18 April 1907, Act. 2724.
Activities and organisation

Between the year of its foundation and 1910, GMC’s main activity consisted of safeguarding commercial goods and other cargo that was stored in warehouses, waiting to be loaded onto cargo ships or freight wagons. Describing itself as a “Société de surveillance pour le port d’Anvers”, its activities took place exclusively in the port of Antwerp. The purpose of the private security company was “to organise a security service for the port of Antwerp, as well as for the monitoring of work activities, the surveillance of movable and immovable property, and other, similar activities, with or without theft liability during the surveillance”. After a couple of years, most notably from 1910 onwards, the company extended its services beyond the warehouses, keeping watch of ships and their cargoes in an attempt to put an end to the most inventive thieves, who were using small boats to steal cargoes from ships. This practice may have been more common than generally assumed, with several indications suggesting that a large number of crimes against property in the port of Antwerp were committed by ‘river thieves’.

GMC’s working methods differed from a typical night-watch service, with security rounds performed both day and night and lasting twelve instead of six hours. A regular security round commenced at noon and ended at midnight, or vice versa. At a client’s request a ‘demi-veille’ or reduced service from 6:00 a.m. till 12:00 p.m. or from 12:00 p.m. till 18:00 p.m. was also possible. This contractual flexibility offered a great advantage to maritime entrepreneurs, as demand for protection greatly depended upon continually changing levels of commercial activity.

A few years after GMC’s establishment, the company reported that, thanks to their specialisation and experience in the field of private crime control, theft of property and complaints related to crime had declined significantly in the Belgian seaport. In an attempt to polish the image of the private security industry in general, and their own in particular, GMC advertised themselves as a professional enterprise, protecting the interests of their many clients. In addition, security guards employed by the Antwerp private security company were claimed to be “strictly inspected” during their service. As mentioned above, the First World War greatly impacted on commercial activities in the port of Antwerp. Because of the company’s close interdependence with the port, it was forced to suspend security services during the First World War, only to restart operations soon after the end of the war.

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100 Belgian official journal, 18 April 1907, Act. 2724, Chapter I, art. 2: “l’organisation d’un service de veilles pour le port d’Anvers, ainsi que pour la surveillance de travaux, garde des propriétés, mobilières et immobilières et autres opérations similaires avec ou sans responsabilité contre vols, durant la surveillance”.

101 RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3688, Correspondence E. Karcher & Co to KVKA, 17 November 1905; RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3688, Correspondence Louis Gutjahr to KVKA, 29 November 1905.

102 RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 355, Correspondence Garde Maritime & Commerciale, 11 May 1932.

103 RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3687, Correspondence Garde Maritime & Commerciale to KVKA, 21 November 1910.

104 RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3687, Correspondence Garde Maritime & Commerciale to KVKA, 21 November 1910.


With industrial and maritime activities in the port of Antwerp slowly regaining momentum after the conflict ended, \textit{GMC} started searching for new customers and markets outside the port. With the creation of its subsidiary \textit{Nachtronde} in 1919, a night-watch service similar to \textit{Waak en Sluit}, \textit{GMC} expanded its business scope and private security activities to the whole of Antwerp.\footnote{\textit{Garde Maritime & Commerciale SA, Guide-Poche Maritime 1931} (1931, p. 7).} From then on, owners of private houses, villas, shops and warehouses outside the port could turn to \textit{GMC}'s nocturnal security guards when looking for private protection. The company declared the formation of \textit{Nachtronde} was a necessity to “[…]better safeguard houses and private property in the then existing atmosphere of insecurity and increasing number of burglaries”\footnote{\textit{GMIC 70 Antwerpen, Lloyd} (1979, s.p.).}. Indeed, recent research on criminal activity in Belgium during and immediately after the war shows that theft was the most important form of crime during that period.\footnote{Leloup, Rousseaux, Vrints (2014).} The rise in armed and violent burglaries in particular, although representing only a very small percentage of total thefts, resulted in growing fears among rural, but to a certain extent also urban, populations. This situation was aggravated by the authorities’ inability to maintain law and order in the first year following the war. The immediate cause was the ongoing re-establishment of the gendarmerie and the municipal police to their full strength. But it seems that commercial incentives also inspired \textit{GMC} to serve private interests. Until at least the early 1920s, \textit{Waak en Sluit} in Antwerp and \textit{La Ronde de Nuit} in Brussels were successfully monopolising the nocturnal urban security market. As already mentioned, both night-watch services included numerous high-profile people and businesses on their client list. Given the success of \textit{GMC} in the port of Antwerp, it was not surprising that the company tried to find new commercial opportunities on the territory of \textit{Waak en Sluit}. Other, more patriotic stimuli may have accelerated the formation of the subsidiary. After the establishment of \textit{Nachtronde}, a noteworthy statement was made by \textit{GMC}, saying that the Belgian citizens could now “disentangle themselves from foreign associations, which pretend to be Belgian without any proof”.\footnote{\textit{GMIC 70 Antwerpen, Lloyd} (1979, s.p.).} However, nearly a quarter of a century after its

Little is known today about the preventive outcome of \textit{GMC}'s services. In its commercial brochures, the company underlined its major role in pushing down theft rates in the port of Antwerp. However, nearly a quarter of a century after its
foundation, various maritime and economic interest organisations criticized GMC’s lack of professionalism and limited efficiency in reducing crime rates, as illustrated by the plentiful correspondence between the opposing parties characterising the underlying security issues in the port of Antwerp. While the public authorities had in 1888 questioned the capabilities and age of warehousing companies’ in-house guards, the director of the Antwerp Shipping Federation similarly questioned the effectiveness of GMC security guards decades later. In response to these allegations, Paul De Leeuw, an agent of the Northern Shipowners Association and related to the GMC, countered the criticism by pointing out that the security company had not received a single complaint from any customer with regards to stolen goods, careless surveillance, etc. However, Cléomir Jussiant, president of the Antwerp Chamber of Commerce in 1933, responded in no uncertain terms “que les intéressés [customers of the GMC] ayant déjà conclu que les critiques n’amenaient aucune amélioration, il était inutile de persister dans cette voie”. Though such debates between the various maritime parties are illuminating, at the end of the day it is difficult to arrive at any solid conclusions. The GMC and other guard services such as Waak en Sluit that started up operations in the port of Antwerp in the second half of the interwar period certainly received support from different persons and organisations. On the other hand, a lot of criticism was levelled by other maritime groups, mostly concerning the inefficiency of hired security personnel, or their long criminal records.

THE GROWTH OF THE PRIVATE SECURITY INDUSTRY

In this article we have described the structure and activities of two of the first private security companies in Belgium. In this last section, we will outline a number of fundamental political, socio-economic and socio-cultural trends in which issues related to crime and crime control have enhanced privatised responses to insecurity. Looking at the rise and expansion of private night-watch services in different European countries in the early twentieth century, similar developments can be identified. In many larger cities in industrialised Western countries, debates on urban night-time security – or the lack thereof – gained momentum in the late nineteenth century, despite state efforts to institutionalise its perceived monopoly in crime control. Guided by motives ranging from the dissemination of information to sensationalism, the printed press pointed to the dangerousness of society in general, and cities in particular. In cities like Paris and London, newspapers started reporting about unsafe urban conditions at night due to inadequate public ‘night police’, hinting at the need to re-establish the old night watch services to guarantee the necessary levels

112 RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 355, Correspondence F.M.A.-A.S.V. to KVKA, 28 July 1933.
113 RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 355, Correspondence P. De Leeuw to KVKA, 12 August 1933.
114 RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 355, Correspondence C. Jussiant to P. De Leeuw, 19 August 1933.
115 SA MA#88510, Bewaking aan de haven (1933-1937), Bijzondere Commissie van onderzoek ter voorkoming van diefstallen aan de haven, 15 October 1936.
116 SA, MA#88510, Bewaking aan de haven (1933-1937), Correspondence Antwerp council member P. Baelde to colleague, 10 July 1935; RAB, AASV, No. 207, vols au port et service sanitaire, Document Comité des Intérêts Maritimes Anversois, 27 February 1929, p. 2.
of security.\footnote{Schlör (1998, p. 89).} In Germany, complaints about the public police’s failure to ensure protection during the night aroused nostalgic images among its citizens of the former night watchman as “ein Stück verlonerer Poesie”.\footnote{Nelken (1926, p. 55).} In Belgium too, critical analyses of urban insecurity and the inefficient police system could be found in the press. In Brussels for example, the local police was under heavy fire as a result of a number of unsolved murders between 1901 and 1907.\footnote{Keunings (1996, pp. 6-7).} In addition, the city’s inhabitants witnessed a huge increase in police-reported property crime at night.\footnote{Keunings (1982, p. 171).} Newspaper stories about dangerous French and German gangs of thieves fuelled moral panic. In general, the overall image of Belgium was that of a dangerous country. According to the contemporary sociologist Henri Joly, the statistical increase of crime rates in Belgium in general and in the larger cities of Brussels and Antwerp in particular was direct proof of the immoral nature of the Belgian population and its violent and alcohol-abusing ‘\textit{classes dangereuses}’.\footnote{Joly (1907).} Henceforth, the myth of ‘\textit{la Belgique criminelle}’ was born. When searching for explanations of the burgeoning private security industry, the historical impact of such continual journalistic attention to crime and insecurity should not be underestimated, certainly not in an era when the distribution of newspapers flourished and news reached a far wider audience than previously.\footnote{Kalifa (1995, pp. 238-243).}

Concerns about the organisation and practice of public law enforcement bodies further accelerated the birth of the private security industry. In Antwerp, the public police was to a great extent occupied with non-criminal aspects of everyday life.\footnote{De Koster (2011, p. 261).} Recent research has revealed that the share of criminal offences in the police reports between 1890 and 1913 dropped significantly from 50 to 35 percent, while the police’s core activities developed towards conflict management and the dissemination of information.\footnote{De Koster (2010, pp. 85-86).} In this respect, daily policing duties had a service-related, rather than a crime-related, approach. This might come as a surprise, as crime rates tend to be higher in port cities.\footnote{Johnson (1995, p. 171).} Apart from selective police action, issues related to local staff capacities in certain districts of the city, like the ‘Tweede Wijk’ or Second District,\footnote{De Koster (2010, p. 84).} also raised questions about the supposed nocturnal regulatory power of the Antwerp police. As mentioned above, an emerging group of citizens in search of nightlife and entertainment put increasing pressure on public law enforcement bodies at the turn of the century.\footnote{Schlör (1998, pp. 71-72).} Since the Second District concentrated cafés, theatres, cinemas and brothels, a great deal of the Antwerp nightlife and its associated crime occurred within this specific urban area. But as literature on the subject shows, (public) policing responses to night-time security in the larger cities proved insufficient
around the turn of the twentieth century. On top of the quantitative and qualitative difficulties the local police suffered from, which are defined below, wealthy citizens and establishment owners were thus turning to private law enforcement firms (e.g. Waak en Sluit) in an attempt to deal with nocturnal threats to their property.

In addition, the crisis in public finances intensified the – to a certain extent unintended – retreat of the police from certain areas of the private domain. This is clearly illustrated by the disputes over ongoing security matters in the port of Antwerp, where the authorities’ acknowledgment of their failure to increase the number of police constables at the docks was in essence due to insufficient financial resources. This, in turn, intensified the security vacuum that was becoming more and more apparent in the port, resulting in several interest groups turning to the private sector. In the city’s urban districts too, police surveillance and patrols were strategically kept to a minimum and restricted to the prosperous streets and neighbourhoods, due to the lack of personnel. Similar budgetary problems in Brussels at the end of the nineteenth century had hampered the formation of a public night-watch service as desired by its Mayor, Karel Buls.

Other factors need to be taken into consideration, in addition to feelings of insecurity and issues related to the system of public law enforcement. In particular, the specific setting of the city and the port of Antwerp, certain circumstances triggered the foundation of GMC. In modern cities like Antwerp, economic and commercial trends certainly contributed to the burgeoning private security sector. The intensification of international trade, the complex structural growth of industrial and commercial enterprises and the expansion of ‘mass private property’ like department stores created new demands for specialised forms of security and surveillance. In essence, the state gradually lost power and control over the public sphere as a result of the increase in the areas which came under the private control of large corporations. In the port of Antwerp this was also the case – but to a much higher degree. On account of its maritime activities, shipping agencies and organisations, banking sector, stock markets and insurance business, Antwerp was known as one of the largest European trading metropolises. The busy economic environment with its uninterrupted flow of goods and people was the criminogenic seedbed behind the port’s security issue. Thousands of low-paid dockworkers, allegedly responsible for most of the thefts, worked daily in and on the unguarded wharves, ships and warehouses filled with tons of easy-to-pilfer merchandise. This convergence of

129 AKVBG, Records of proceedings VBG, 20 January 1888.
130 See e.g. RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No 3687, Correspondence Eiffe & Co to KVKA, 18 December 1905; RAB, KVK ANTW 2003 (B128), No. 3687, Correspondence Kennedy, Hunter & Co to KVKA, 7 December 1905.
133 With the term ‘mass private property’, Shearing and Stenning refer to “the control over large tracts of property by corporate interests dominated by relatively small numbers of people” (1981, p. 228).
135 Loyen (2008b, pp. 63-64).
likely offenders and suitable targets, alongside the absence of capable guardians (state police or security staff), serves as a theoretical explanation of why the high theft rates remained constant or at least did not decline.

The economic approach to crime and crime control in the port of Antwerp can also be seen in terms of loss prevention and early forms of modern risk management. New ways of thinking about cost-benefit security arrangements and analyses may have been, as Garland states, primarily developed within the private security industry itself; they have certainly also contributed to the sectors’ own development. Within this article it would take us too far to discuss the extensive historical evidence on this matter, though a wide range of correspondence between maritime interest parties supports these findings. Even at a time when crime was mostly seen as a “product of degeneracy or pathology”, in the port of Antwerp the analysis of crime and crime control was to a large extent economically motivated around the turn of the century. This rational thinking in terms of risk reduction and situational crime prevention appears to have contributed greatly to the emergence of the modern private security sector. Finally, the insurance sector also played a major role, putting further pressure on maritime corporations in the port of Antwerp in the late 1920s. In an attempt to lower the financial risks, insurers advised their commercial clients to upgrade surveillance of their goods. In the case of merchandise remaining unguarded or crime prevention measures being insufficient, insurance companies refused to cover losses, a practice their clients were well aware of. Therefore, from a historical perspective, the industrial and commercial sector played a major role in promoting the growth of the modern private security industry. Maritime interest groups of merchants, shipping agencies, traders, etc. took matters into their own hands when public action failed to materialise and established GMC. As a matter of fact, the same developments had been seen decades earlier in the United States of America, when in April 1883 seventeen small jewellery stores united to form the Jewelers’ Security Alliance, supported by the Pinkerton Agency.

Reviewing the activities of the Pinkerton Agency, especially with regard to strikes, we can ask whether the GMC was used for the same purposes. In the face of growing societal and labour unrest in the United States, due to the increasing power of workers’ movements, employers and patrons appealed to private detective agencies and associated strike-breakers. The emergence of large-scale primary industries during the second half of the nineteenth century and the associated increasing numbers of unskilled labourers and subsequent strikes promoted the search for law-and-order enforcement by private organisations like the Pinkerton Agency. At the

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137 Cohen, Felson (1979, p. 589).
139 AKVBG, Record of proceedings VBG, 22 May 1885; RAB, KVK ANTW. 2003 (B128), No. 3688, Correspondence chairman tobacco industry to KVKA, 20 November 1905; RAB, KVK ANTW. 2003 (B128), No. 3688, Correspondence KVKA to Minister of Railroad Transport, Maritime Affairs, Post Office and Telegraph, 25 August 1919.
140 Zedner (2006, p. 84).
141 RAB, AASV, No. 207, vols au port et service sanitaire, Document Comité des Intérêts Maritimes Anversois, 27 February 1929.
143 Spitzer, Scull (1977).
turn of the twentieth century, several strikes hit the port of Antwerp. It is worth noting that GMC was established after a few of these severe dock strikes, though no direct relationship with these developments can be detected. Up to now, and in the context of this exploratory study, no empirical evidence has been found in support of this theory. Nevertheless, further research on the history process of disciplinary workforce control in the coalmining (e.g. Union Minière) and steel industry, or other primary industries in Belgium, may reveal useful new insights.

THE INTERFACE BETWEEN PRIVATE SECURITY AND THE STATE POLICE

It seems that the extent to which the authorities were open to early forms of public-private police cooperation depended largely upon the governing parties’ perceptions of privatisation within the criminal justice system. In the bigger cities in general, the authorities recognized the contribution private firms could make in the field of policing.\textsuperscript{144} While there are almost no primary sources providing us with information on public-private cooperation between 1907 and 1934, the scarce data available do suggest that both Waak en Sluit and GMC were considered valuable partners by the authorities and state police in Antwerp in the first years after the Second World War, while other, smaller or foreign security firms seemed to avoid any police interference.\textsuperscript{145} GMC in particular, the largest and, according to the judicial police, the most trustworthy of the security companies active in the port of Antwerp, provided the state police agencies with useful information on criminal offences occurring in and around the port. Waak en Sluit was similarly accepted as a private partner in the prevention of nocturnal crime.\textsuperscript{146} These findings correlate to a certain extent with the theoretical explanations put forward by Kakalik and Wildhorn in their well-known RAND report, stating that private security companies act as “junior partners in law enforcement, who fill gaps and take up the slack left by the public police”.\textsuperscript{147} In contrast to the Protective Foot Patrol of the Pinkerton Agency, however, little is known about relations between the state-controlled police forces and such private security companies as Waak en Sluit. While in Chicago Mayor John Haines even paid for the Protective Foot Patrol as a supplementary police force, it is highly doubtful whether a similar practice existed in Antwerp.\textsuperscript{148} There seems to have been a mutual understanding between the Antwerp authorities and the larger organisations within the private security sector, but the extent thereof needs to be further investigated. While on the other hand La Ronde de Nuit was criticised by the public police in Brussels, the Antwerp night-watch service cooperated well with its public counterpart. Keunings claims that its guards were even permitted to wear a sabre while on patrol,\textsuperscript{149} although other sources seem to rebut this statement.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{144} Van Outrive \textit{et al.} (1992, p. 77).
\textsuperscript{145} RAB, PK ANTW 2003 (R532), No. 2227, Information report judicial police, 22 May 1951.
\textsuperscript{146} Keunings (1982, p. 107).
\textsuperscript{147} Shearing, Stenning (1981, p. 220).
\textsuperscript{148} Morn (1982, pp. 29-30).
\textsuperscript{149} Keunings (1982, p. 107).
\textsuperscript{150} RAB, PK ANTW 2003 (R532), No. 2227, Information report judicial police, 11 March 1947.
The judicial and state police feared that the use or mere carrying of truncheons or firearms by private security personnel could pour oil on the fire when dealing, for example, with Antwerp dockworkers. In addition to this concern, the public authorities were well aware that granting more wide-ranging policing powers to at least one security firm would result in an immediate request from other companies claiming similar privileges. Against this background, it is reasonable to assume that no private security personnel were ever allowed to wear weapons, as also stated by GMC director Jaspers.

Given the lack of archival sources for the period between 1907 and 1934, little is known about the security companies’ actual policing powers with regard to arresting and detaining suspected criminals or other persons caught in the act. Nevertheless, information on enforcement measures by KWS security guards in Germany is available. One Berlin guard who surprised two burglars in the act on the night of 5 to 6 December 1905 brought down one of them with his sabre and subsequently handed him over to the police. On numerous other occasions when security personnel caught lawbreakers in the act in German cities, the handling appears similar, albeit not so violent. In all cases, offenders caught in the act by KWS night watchmen were taken to a nearby police station where they were taken into custody. In cases where the alarmed police were on site themselves, suspects were handed over to them immediately. The same applied for GMC, and almost certainly for Waak en Sluit as well, as the authorities advised security guards to immediately contact the port police after an offender was caught or a theft noticed. Although written in 1947, a judicial inquiry conducted by the public prosecutor, within the context of the law on private militias reveals, that the company repeatedly asked permission for their security personnel to body-search suspected offenders and to carry truncheons, thus illustrating the limited policing powers private guards possessed. Each time, the request was refused. Taking this into account, neither Waak en Sluit or GMC had the power to arrest or detain suspects, nor to use any kind of weapon or serve someone with a summons. Under certain circumstances, i.e. when an offender was caught in the act, private security guards could resort to ‘lawful citizen’s arrest’, i.e. detain the culprit preceding his actual arrest by the state police. Nevertheless, the judicial police stated in the inquiry that the port police was held in greater esteem by dockworkers than security personnel in the service of a private company, above all because of its police powers.

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152 RAB, PK ANTW 2003 (R532), No. 2227, Interrogation Pieter Jaspers, GMC director, 11 July 1949.
155 Ibid., p. 37).
157 RAB, PK ANTW 2003 (R532), No. 2227, Correspondence public prosecutor, 31 December 1947.
158 RAB, PK ANTW 2003 (R532), No. 2227, Information report judicial police, 23 December 1948.
159 Ibid., 11 March 1947.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to examine the development of the private security industry in Antwerp. As we have observed, 1907 marked at least a symbolic shift in the nature of private security in Belgium with the establishment of the night watch service *Waak en Sluit* and the first security company *Garde Maritime & Commerciale*, laying the foundations of Belgium’s modern-day private security industry. As a night watch service, *Waak en Sluit*’s main objectives were to protect citizens’ property at night against burglary, theft, (water) damage and fire, and to watch over stored merchandise. Besides guarding residential houses, security guards could be hired to safeguard commercial establishments, cultural institutions, commercial offices and industrial sites. In the port of Antwerp, *Garde Maritime & Commerciale* security staff were responsible for guarding goods and merchandise left on the wharves or stored in the warehouses. In a later phase, activities were expanded to on-board surveillance, as well as patrolling Antwerp residential areas at night, in competition with *Waak en Sluit*.

In our attempt to provide a preliminary picture of the ‘rent-a-cop’ industry in Antwerp, we have distinguished a complex set of societal conditions and transformations accelerating the growth and expansion of the private security sector. Alongside a number of quantitative and qualitative shortcomings of the public police, modern societal changes increasingly challenged the criminal justice system and its responses to public disorder. Especially in the larger cities such as Antwerp or Brussels, the public regulatory bodies were confronted with new urban phenomena, putting a strain on local police departments. A combination of budgetary issues and an increase in disorderly conduct closely linked to industrialisation and urbanisation eventually directed police action towards a more service-oriented approach to the detriment of crime control. However, police-reported crime rates in Belgium in general, and in the larger cities in particular, were high in the late nineteenth century, with the ‘la Belgique criminelle’ myth being enhanced by press emphasis on crime-related topics. In Antwerp, we argue, such developments accelerated the growth of the security industry and the foundation of *Waak en Sluit*, although other, more specific driving forces may have contributed too. Both *Waak en Sluit* and *La Ronde de Nuit*, for example, were subsidiaries of the larger German Wach- und Schließgesellschaften. The remarkable rate at which the night-watch services of the Kölner Verband spread throughout Europe by the dawn of the twentieth century is indicative of economic and commercial motives. Moreover, Antwerp was known for its economic and trading activities which had created and attracted a lot of prosperous citizens. The presence of a wealthy class and a wide range of large estates, shops, commercial businesses and nightlife establishments and a banking and insurance industry generated the structural conditions for the emergence of profit-oriented guard services. To a certain extent, the growth and expansion of *Garde Maritime & Commerciale* mirrored that of *Waak en Sluit*, even though the rationale for founding the companies differed. The empirical data on the origins of *GMC* is quite clear, with decades of security-related issues in the port of Antwerp giving birth to a wide range of crime (or loss) prevention measures undertaken by maritime interest groups, among them the creation of the *Garde Maritime & Commerciale*. Nevertheless, commercial motives certainly intensified the expansion of its guard services beyond the port of Antwerp, as witnessed by the post-First World War foundation of *Nachtronde*. In comparison to police officers, private security agents lacked specific
policing powers with regard to arrest or detention, and were restrained from carrying any type of weapon. However, it seems the Antwerp authorities and state police accepted both *Waak en Sluit* and *GMC* as partners in crime control.

To conclude, we argue that the historical roots of Belgium’s modern-day private security industry can be found in the establishment of a number of private policing companies at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although other private law enforcement bodies existed before, organisations like *Waak en Sluit* and especially *Garde Maritime & Commerciale*, seem to mark at least a symbolic shift in the private provision of security, mostly in terms of their activities, professional and commercial characteristics and *modi operandi*. This article has highlighted the importance of a historical perspective to uncover long-term patterns and the predecessors of what today is understood as ‘plural policing’. Nevertheless, additional archival research on the topic is necessary to identify the exact conditions shaping the nature of the security industry throughout the twentieth century and its sometimes ambiguous relationship with other public forms of policing. Only by doing so, and by focusing on both historical continuities and changes, can we fully comprehend the significance and importance of current trends in security and crime control.

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