

# Financial Depletion, Faction Struggle and Competing Networks. The Background to Count Harrach's Reforms of the Southern Netherlands' Central Government (1733-1735)

Klaas van Gelder

Financiële crisis, factiestrijd en rivaliserende netwerken : de achtergronden van graaf Harrachs hervormingen in het Zuid-Nederlandse centrale bestuursapparaat (1733-1735)

In 1735 kondigde keizer Karel vi een belangrijke hervorming af van het centrale Zuid-Nederlandse bestuursapparaat, gepaard met een ongeziene personeelsswissel in de Brusselse financiële administratie. Deze maatregelen kwamen er op aangeven van Friedrich August von Harrach, naast de landvoogdes de leidende minister in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, die sinds zijn aankomst in Brussel in 1733 aangedrongen had op de hervormingen en op een radicaal andere personeelsswerving. Talenten en ervaring moesten daarbij doorslaggevend zijn. In dit artikel wordt onderzocht welke motieven en ideeën aan de basis lagen van zijn hervormingsvoorstellen en op welke wijze hij deze kon doordrukken. Daarbij wordt onder meer aandacht geschonken aan de in Brussels heersende factiestrijd en de rol van informele netwerken om de besluitvorming te beïnvloeden. Het resultaat is een nuancering van het beeld van modernisering dat rond deze hervormingen hangt, en een herinterpretatie van de besluitvormingsprocessen met betrekking tot de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden.

## Citer ce document / Cite this document :

Gelder Klaas van. Financial Depletion, Faction Struggle and Competing Networks. The Background to Count Harrach's Reforms of the Southern Netherlands' Central Government (1733-1735). In: Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire, tome 92, fasc. 4, 2014. Histoire médiévale, moderne et contemporaine Milieu moderne, moderne en hedendaagse geschiedenis. pp. 1081-1112;

doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/rbph.2014.8604>

[https://www.persee.fr/doc/rbph\\_0035-0818\\_2014\\_num\\_92\\_4\\_8604](https://www.persee.fr/doc/rbph_0035-0818_2014_num_92_4_8604)

Fichier pdf généré le 18/04/2018

# Financial Depletion, Faction Struggle and Competing Networks

## The Background to Count Harrach's Reforms of the Southern Netherlands' Central Government (1733-1735)<sup>(1)</sup>

Klaas VAN GELDER

*Postdoctoraal medewerker FWO-Vlaanderen; Universiteit Gent*

One of the few historians to have examined the rather unknown and, perhaps therefore, somewhat unloved first decades of Austrian rule in the Southern Netherlands, was the Antwerp professor Piet Lenders (1918-2002). He was also one of the first to delve into the sources on the revealing term of office of count Friedrich August von Harrach, who was head of the household of governor-general Maria Elisabeth from 1733 until her death in 1741. Harrach was the driving force behind the institutional reform of the central government apparatus in Brussels in 1735, and the sweeping changes in personnel that accompanied it. In a 1981 article, Lenders elaborately described these reforms and framed them in the context of the War of the Polish Succession (1733-1738), which, according to him, served as a catalyst for the centralizing measures in the Southern Netherlands<sup>(2)</sup>. In a short publication seven years later, he even suggested that Harrach's institutional reorganization represented a turning point in the Austrian administration of these provinces. It marked the transition from twenty years of institutional experiments and the tentative search for an appropriate administration, predominantly inspired by French absolutist models, towards a more participative way of governing in which, however, control over local institutions and finances was steadily enhanced<sup>(3)</sup>. Lenders largely relied on documents found in Belgian archives and on edited sources. The vast amount of letters, consults, reports and dispatches conserved in Viennese archives, were mostly omitted from the

(1) This article has been written as part of my postdoctoral research project on the modernization process of the government in eighteenth-century Southern Netherlands, funded by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) and conducted at the University of Ghent, Belgium. Part of the archive research was carried out thanks to a Richard Plaschka Grant from the *Österreichischer Austauschdienst*, funded by the Austrian *Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung*, which enabled me to spend half a year in Vienna in 2014. I would like to thank Professor Elisabeth Garms-Cornides for her tips concerning the Harrach Family Archives and for her reflections on the topic.

(2) Piet LENDERS, "Ontwikkelingen van politiek en instellingen in de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden. De invloed van de Europese oorlogen", in *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis*, vol. 64, 1981, 1-2, p. 33-78.

(3) Piet LENDERS, "Drie wijzen van regeren van de Habsburgers in de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden", in *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, vol. 42, 1988, p. 183-192.

picture. In 1994, he then published a critical edition of 23 of Harrach's letters or parts of letters, copied by Patrice François de Neny (1716-1784) during one of the latter's Viennese sojourns. Thanks to these copies, conserved in the Brussels' *Algemeen Rijksarchief*, Lenders' attention shifted towards Harrach in person, and to his motives for pursuing the reforms<sup>(4)</sup>.

Since these publications, there have been significant changes in ideas about the workings of Early Modern state apparatuses. The omnipotence of the monarch has been nuanced, the supposed absolutism of the epoch put into perspective. At the same time, the importance of face-to-face relations, patronage networks and informal decision-making has been highlighted<sup>(5)</sup>. In the wake of these developments, I propose reconsidering Harrach's reforms, without however questioning the merits of Lenders' work, but rather complementing it. The aim of this article is to shed light on the combination of actors and factors that shaped Harrach's decisions, both in the sense of inspiring and hindering them. In doing so, I will unravel the decision-making processes, throw light on some of the coalitions that emerged between officials, and outline some of Harrach's motives and patterns of thought. For the latter, the findings of Lenders' third article mentioned above, can be enriched thanks to the incredible amount of letters to and from Friedrich August, preserved in the *Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv* and the *Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv*, both in Vienna. Furthermore, I will concentrate on some aspects that help to explain why he successfully achieved many of his proposals. Therefore, the Brussels administration responsible for the Southern Netherlands needs to be examined together with the Viennese institutions, where the Harrach family network came into play. The analysis of these aspects leads me to propose that Harrach's reforms were not only a first step towards the modernization of the government of the Austrian Netherlands, as Lenders has done, but also an example of how informal

(4) Piet LENDERS, "Les conceptions politiques et la personnalité du Grand Maître de la Cour Frédéric de Harrach (1733-1743). Leur reflet dans la correspondance des premières années de l'exercice de ses fonctions à Bruxelles", in *Bulletin de la Commission royale d'Histoire*, vol. 160, 1994, 1-2, p. 87-141. These reforms are briefly discussed in: Franz PICHORNER, *Wiener Quellen zu den Österreichischen Niederlanden. Die Statthalter Erzherzogin Maria Elisabeth und Graf Friedrich Harrach (1725-1743)*, Vienna, Böhlau, 1990, p. 59-68; Renate ZEDINGER, *Die Verwaltung der Österreichischen Niederlande in Wien (1714-1795). Studien zu den Zentralisierungstendenzen des Wiener Hofes im Staatswerdungsprozeß der Habsburgermonarchie*, Vienna, Böhlau, 2000, p. 66-68 and 95-102.

(5) I refer to some works that were important for my understanding of the Early Modern state formation processes, without claiming that these are representative of the huge amount of books and articles published in the last decades: Nicholas HENSHALL, "Early Modern Absolutism 1550-1700: Political Reality or Propaganda?", in Ronald ASCH & Heinz DUCHHARDT, eds., *Der Absolutismus – ein Mythos? Strukturwandel monarchischer Herrschaft in West- und Mitteleuropa (ca. 1550-1700)*, Cologne, Böhlau Verlag, 1996, p. 25-53; Sharon KETTERING, "The Historical Development of Political Clientelism", in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 18, 1988, 3, p. 419-447; Stefan BRAKENSIEK, "Akzeptanzorientierte Herrschaft. Überlegungen zur politischen Kultur der Frühen Neuzeit", in Helmut NEUHAUS, ed., *Die Frühe Neuzeit als Epoche*, Munich, Oldenbourg, 2009, p. 395-406; André HOLENSTEIN, "Introduction. Empowering Interactions: Looking at Statebuilding from Below", in Wim BLOCKMANS, André HOLENSTEIN & Jon MATHIEU, eds., *Empowering Interactions. Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe 1300-1900*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, p. 1-31.

decision-making and lobbying determined the way Harrach pursued his plans.

In what follows, I start with a brief sketch of the political and financial context in which these reforms took place, and what exactly they entailed. This will be followed by paragraphs on the underlying principles and motives that guided Harrach, the faction struggle in which his reform project was embedded, the family, friendship and patronage ties that were used to implement it, and the aftermath of these reforms. In the conclusion, I bring together all lines of inquiry in order to put forward a nuanced view on the reforms that took place under Harrach.

### Harrach and the worrying financial situation in the Southern Netherlands

Friedrich August von Harrach (1698-1749) was appointed *grand maître de la Cour* or head of the household of Archduchess Maria Elisabeth (1680-1741) in Brussels at the end of 1732<sup>(6)</sup>. He owed this appointment to the archduchess and to Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736), himself a former governor-general of the Southern Netherlands<sup>(7)</sup>. At the time, Harrach was a promising diplomat in the imperial service, having just secured the recognition of the Pragmatic Sanction by the Elector of Cologne. He appears to have been a very energetic person, and a passionate letter writer with a very down-to-earth style, not to say a sharp pen<sup>(8)</sup>. In Brussels, Friedrich August had multiple, mostly political tasks: these included informing the governor-general about all administrative matters, helping re-establish the institutional machinery disrupted during the War of the Spanish Succession, and reconstructing the depleted public finances<sup>(9)</sup>. The *grand maître de la Cour* was an advisor and controller at the same time: he was also appointed to prevent a too autonomous policy being conducted by Maria Elisabeth. In the course of the years, with the archduchess increasingly troubled by the

(6) An official appointment charter has never been found. Charles VI communicated his decision to nominate Harrach through a dispatch to Maria Elisabeth: Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv [henceforth HHStA], Belgien DD A – Kaiserliche Depeschen, rote Nummer [henceforth Depeschen], 12: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 20 December 1732.

(7) Sandra HERTEL, *Maria Elisabeth. Österreichische Erzherzogin und Statthalterin in Brüssel, 1725-1741*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 2014, p. 210; R. ZEDINGER, *Die Verwaltung, op. cit.*, p. 51-52.

(8) On Friedrich von Harrach: Hans WAGNER, "Harrach, Friedrich August Gervas, österr. Staatsmann", in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Bd. 7 : Grassauer – Hartmann, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1966, p. 700; Piet LENDERS, "Harrach, Friedrich August Gervais von, graaf, hofmeester van landvoogdes Marie Elisabeth", in *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, Brussels, Paleis der Academiën, vol. 14, 1992, col. 245-250; Elisabeth GARMS-CORNIDES, "On n'a qu'à vouloir; et tout est possible oder I bin halt wer I bin. Eine Gebrauchsanweisung für den Wiener Hof, geschrieben von Friedrich August Harrach für seinen Bruder Ferdinand Bonaventura", in Gabriele HAUG-MORITZ, Hans-Peter HYE & Marlies RAFFLER, eds., *Adel im „langen“ 18. Jahrhundert*, Vienna, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009, p. 89-111.

(9) Cf. Instructions to Harrach, 17 November 1732, edited in: Elisabeth KOVÁCS, ed., *Instruktionen und Patente Karls (III.) VI. Und Maria Theresias für die Statthalter, Interimsstatthalter, Bevollmächtigten Minister und Obersthofmeister der Österreichischen Niederlande (1703-1744)*, Vienna, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1993, p. 301-311.

infirmities of old age, Harrach managed to become ever more dominant in the government of the Southern Netherlands, though the opposition against him mounted as well<sup>(10)</sup>.

In January 1733, Friedrich arrived in Brussels. His commission was very unenviable: he found the Austrian Netherlands heavily indebted, economically weak and run by an inefficient central administrative system. The end of the War of the Spanish Succession had heralded eighty years of Austrian Rule in the Southern Netherlands. The official assumption of power by Emperor Charles VI (1685-1740) had taken place in February 1716, but the emperor inherited impoverished provinces in which the economy languished. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, this territory had been involved in several consecutive wars, transforming it into one of Europe's major battlefields. Nor was the post-war situation conducive to economic recovery. The Barrier Treaty, signed on November 15, 1715, between Austria, the Dutch Republic and Great Britain, converted the Southern Netherlands into a buffer zone between the Republic and France. Eight so-called barrier fortresses, manned by Dutch troops, were intended to halt any French expansion northwards. Every year the Southern Netherlands had to come up with half a million *ecus* for their upkeep – the equivalent of 1,400,000 Brabant guilders or florins *courant* (Br. fl.). This was the so-called barrier subsidy. In addition, the treaty contained a programme for massive debt repayments to the Republic. These payments together with the subsidy constituted roughly one-third of the net income of the Southern Netherlands' government in the years 1715-1739. Topping it all off, the treaty's clauses fixed custom duties with the Republic and Great-Britain. These were extremely harmful to the commerce of the Southern Netherlands and precluded any sustained economic recovery<sup>(11)</sup>.

From the very start of his term of office, Harrach's correspondence reflects this financial depletion<sup>(12)</sup>. Repeatedly he stressed the inability to pay office-holders' wages, pensions and outstanding debts, complaining at the same time about the very chaotic management of the Southern Netherlands' finances and the lack of clarity regarding the totality of government expenses<sup>(13)</sup>.

(10) Piet LENDERS, "Grootmeester van het Hof (1725-1741)", in Erik AERTS, Michel BAELEDE et al., eds., *De centrale overheidsinstellingen van de Habsburgse Nederlanden (1482-1795)*, Brussels, Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1994, vol. 1, p. 246-255.

(11) On the tumultuous transition from Spanish to Austrian rule in the Southern Netherlands: Klaas VAN GELDER, *Regime Change at a Distance. Austria and the Southern Netherlands Following the War of the Spanish Succession (1716-1725)*, Brussels-Louvain, KVAB-Press-Peeters Publishing, manuscript submitted for publication. Chapter 3 deals with the Barrier Treaty.

(12) He was warned of the dire situation before his departure for Brussels: Vienna, Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv [henceforth AVA], Familienarchiv Harrach [henceforth FH], 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 23 December 1732. For reasons of conciseness, Friedrich August will always be called "Harrach" in the footnotes, his father Aloys Thomas will be called "Aloys Harrach".

(13) Cf. HHStA, Belgien DD A – Berichte [henceforth Berichte], 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 10 and 14 April 1733; HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 5 January, 30 April and 23 July 1734; HHStA, Berichte, 36: Harrach to Rialp, 18 March and 23 September 1735. Harrach's French letters, conserved in numbers 34-37 of the file HHStA, Berichte, almost never reveal the addressee. However, the copies of his letters to don

He blamed his predecessor, Giulio Visconti (1664-1751), who was about to replace Harrach's father as viceroy of Naples. "Mr. Count Visconti deserves you making sure that he finds the [Neapolitan] treasuries empty, and all funds absorbed by advances, as he did to me here, (...) because it seems that in financial matters, as in all others, he has done all he could to make my ministry difficult", Friedrich wrote his father Aloys Thomas von Harrach (1669-1742), the outgoing viceroy<sup>(14)</sup>.

However embellished Harrach's reports may have been in order to lobby for his proposals in Vienna, historiography confirms his dismal depiction. On the basis of five so-called *états prévisionnels* or *bilans* – surveys of estimated revenues and expenses of the Southern Netherlands' treasury – Hervé Hasquin inferred an enduring financial depression during the reign of Charles VI. Every single bilan shows the expenses far exceeding revenues. The slight economic and financial upturn at the beginning of the twenties was annihilated at the end of this decade as a result of both the economic crisis and the cessation of the activities of the Ostend Company. With the arrival of governor-general Maria Elisabeth in Brussels at the end of 1725, the costs of her household placed an extra burden on the already depleted finances. Luckily, the conversion of outstanding debts to the Dutch Republic into domestic debts at lower interest rates, achievable through the credit of the Estates of Brabant, procured a significant reduction in government expenses in the years 1729-1734, as Herman Coppens calculated. This success notwithstanding, the bilan for 1733 still shows a substantial deficit: 7,853,265 Br. fl. income with 9,180,747 Br. fl. in expenses<sup>(15)</sup>. This illustrates the tiny financial margins within which Harrach had to operate, even before the War of the Polish Succession broke out in the second half of 1733. This war resulted in increased taxes granted by the estates, although a Convention of Neutrality between France and the Republic prevented the warring powers from battling on Southern Netherlands' soil<sup>(16)</sup>.

Ramón de Vilana Perlas, Marquis of Rialp (1663-1741), contained in numbers 576-578 of the Harrach Family Archive, helped me to identify many of these as being Harrach's original letters to Rialp. For those that could not be identified, I consistently indicate in the footnotes that the addressee is 'presumably' Rialp.

(14) AVA, FH, 632: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 3 March 1733: "Mr. le Comte de Visconti meriteroit bien que vous lui fassiez trouver toutes la caisse vuide, et tous les fonds absorbés par des avances, comme il me l'a fait icy, (...) car il semble qu'en matiere d'argent, comme en toutes autres, il aït fait tout ce qu'il a pu, pour rendre mon ministère difficile".

(15) Hervé HASQUIN, "Les difficultés financières du gouvernement des Pays-Bas autrichiens au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (1717-1740)", in *Revue internationale d'Histoire de la Banque*, vol. 6, 1973, p. 100-133; Herman COPPENS, *De financiën van de centrale regering van de Zuidelijke Nederlanden aan het einde van het Spaanse en onder Oostenrijks bewind (ca. 1680-1788)*, Brussels, Paleis der Academiën, 1992, p. 272-278.

(16) P. LENDERS, "Ontwikkeling van politiek en instellingen", *art. cit.*, p. 37-41. For a general outline of the War of the Polish Succession (1733-1738): Michael HOCHEDLINGER, *Austria's Wars of Emergence. War, State and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1683-1797*, London, Pearson Education Limited, 2003, p. 208-212; Olaf VAN NIMWEGEN, *De Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden als grote mogendheid. Buitenlandse politiek en oorlogvoering in de eerste helft van de achttiende eeuw en in het bijzonder tijdens de Oostenrijkse Successieoorlog (1740-1748)*, Amsterdam, De Bataafsche Leeuw, 2002, p. 67-78.



In this context, it is hardly surprising that the emperor and his administration were eager to make structural changes to overcome the shortcomings. Right from the start of Charles' assumption of power in the Southern Netherlands, he asked for clear outlines of income and expenditure at all levels of administration. A policy of farming out major sources of revenues, such as customs duties and domains, was pursued, albeit with mixed success. The reorganization of the infantry and cavalry regiments as from 1725 was also essentially an economy measure<sup>(17)</sup>. Abolishing perceived useless offices had more or less been a *topos* since 1716, but only led to the disappearance of minor functions and had limited impact on the state accounts. The principal achievement in this respect was the imperial decision in 1728 – so before Harrach's arrival – to abolish the office of the *audiencier*, the most important secretary of state in Brussels. The office, which came with a generous salary, was axed at the next vacancy<sup>(18)</sup>. Possibly the most far-reaching step of the emperor was the introduction of *intendants*, essentially agents of the central government sent to the provinces with the main task of supervising and controlling local finances. These intendants, incarnating the alleged French absolutism, had operated in the Spanish Netherlands in war times. They had been fully introduced during the short reign of Philip V in 1702 (the so-called Angevin Regime), but then been abolished as soon as Austria's allies chased away Philip's troops and conquered these provinces from 1706 onwards. In 1718 and 1725, Charles VI tried to establish intendants in peacetime, but in vain. The combined opposition of the Estates of Brabant and the Council of Finance, among others, prevented the plan being put into effect<sup>(19)</sup>. Eventually, in January 1733, Charles VI promulgated a new instruction and reorganization of the Council of Finance, which consisted at the time of one *trésorier-général* as its head and five councillors. The activities of this advisory body were to be divided among four departments: domains, *aides et subsides* (the taxes granted by the estates), custom duties and economic affairs. According to Jan-Baptist Windey, who has written the most elaborate work on the functioning of the Council of Finance under Charles VI, these instructions laid the foundations for a stricter and more centrally controlled management of public finances, even if the normative situation did not always correspond to and the reality<sup>(20)</sup>. Lenders, for example,

(17) For the financial policy during Prié's ministry: K. VAN GELDER, *Regime Change*, *op. cit.*, chapter 7 of the manuscript.

(18) HHStA, Depeschen, 10: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 22 May 1728. Lenders seems to think this was only decided in 1735: P. LENDERS, "Ontwikkeling van politiek en instellingen", *art. cit.*, p. 45-46. The idea of abolishing this bureau already existed in 1717: HHStA, Berichte, 3: Marquis of Prié to Eugene of Savoy, 13 December 1717. Cf. Catherine HÉNIN, *La charge d'audiencier dans les anciens Pays-Bas (1413-1744)*, Brussels, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2001, p. 165-169.

(19) Hervé HASQUIN, "Les intendants et la centralisation administrative dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles", in *Anciens Pays et Assemblées d'États. Standen en Landen*, vol. 47, 1968, p. 171-224.

(20) Herman COPPENS in coll. with Michel BAELE, "Raad van Financiën (1531-1795)", in E. AERTS, M. BAELE et al., eds., *De centrale overheidsinstellingen*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 497-522; Jan-Baptist WINDEY, *De Raad van Financiën in de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden onder keizer Karel VI (1725-1740)*, Ghent, unpublished thesis University of Ghent, 1971, p. 42-46. The ordinance containing the new instructions with 276 articles,

alluded to the fact that some of the clauses were not or not immediately implemented<sup>(21)</sup>.

Thus, the reforms of Friedrich August von Harrach did not appear out of thin air. Since the start of the Austrian regime, the authorities in both Vienna and Brussels had searched for reforms and measures to alleviate the financial burden and increase the strength of the government. A major step in this process were the institutional reforms of October 1735. A series of obsolete offices were finally annulled, such as the *veedor* and *contador*, responsible for controlling the payments of the Spanish troops in the Netherlands and its bookkeeping, and the lieutenant-general of the Castle of Ghent. The imminent abolition of the *audiencier* was confirmed. The age-old *Chambres des Comptes* of Flanders and Brabant, the most important princely institutions for controlling public finances, were merged. Their temporary amalgamation between 1702 and 1706 was thus repeated, this time definitively. The hope was that this would allow the staff to specialize and better perform the duties of the *Chambres*. The customs duties were no longer farmed out, but the *Bureau de Régie des droits d'entrée et de sortie*, established by the tax farmer Adam Joseph de Sottelet, was taken over by the Council of Finance. This laid the foundations for a real economic policy, although the bureau would not be completely successful before the 1760s<sup>(22)</sup>. The intendants, on the other hand, were never implemented. Instead, temporary *commissaires* were delegated to investigate local and provincial public finances. These reforms were accompanied by a unprecedented change of personnel, affecting no less than 14 persons in the *Chambres des Comptes* and the Council of Finance. Harrach tried to replace those who had received offices thanks to favouritism with skilled officials selected on the basis of their competences. In fact, in 1735 Charles VI followed most of the suggestions Harrach had made in his *Expediens qu'on croit pouvoir prendre pour le redressement des Païs-Bas*. These proposals entailed not only institutional reforms and the employment of more capable staff, but also measures to reinvigorate the economy, diminish expenses and enhance the flow of money into government treasuries. According to Lenders, Harrach managed to break entirely with the remnants of the Spanish way of governing, and incarnated a new mentality in which talent and energy were the main prerequisites for state service<sup>(23)</sup>. How, then, did he come to these proposals?

dated 28 January 1733, can be found in: Louis-Prosper GACHARD, *Recueil des ordonnances des Pays-Bas autrichiens*. Troisième série: 1700-1794 [henceforth *ROPBA*], Brussels, Fr. Gobbaerts, 1877, vol. 4, p. 471-492. A handwritten version with 280 articles and extra reflections in the margins, in: HHStA, Depeschen, 12, attached to the letter from Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 31 January 1733.

(21) P. LENDERS, "Ontwikkeling van politiek en instellingen", *art. cit.*, p. 47; ID., "Les conceptions politiques", *art. cit.*, p. 100.

(22) Cf. Philippe MOUREAUX, "Un organe peu connu du gouvernement des Pays-Bas autrichiens: Le Bureau de régie des droits d'entrée et de sortie", in *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* [henceforth *RBPH*], vol. 44, 1966, 2, p. 479-499.

(23) For a detailed description of the reforms: LENDERS, "Ontwikkeling van politiek en instellingen", *art. cit.*, p. 39-56. A copy of the *Expediens*, consisting of 24 proposals with the original comments (probably from the emperor) in the margins, can be found in: HHStA, Depeschen, 13b. A more elaborate version with 29 articles is conserved in: AVA, FH, 630. A letter to Rialp dated 1 January 1734, in which Harrach gives an extensive list of savings



## Underlying principles and motives

The first and foremost motive for reforming the government, as already mentioned, was the financial depletion. Harrach was certainly not the only one alarmed by the poor financial state of the Austrian Netherlands or the Austrian monarchy as a whole. Several imperial dispatches also reflect this concern, for example those from November 19, 1735, in which Charles VI ordered concrete savings measures in addition to the institutional rearrangements enacted one month earlier<sup>(24)</sup>. In these dispatches, he explicitly connects the financial exhaustion with the difficulties of maintaining a corps of 18,000 soldiers in the Southern Netherlands, as prescribed by the Barrier agreement. In Harrach's mind as well, financial and military worries were linked. He feared that the undermanned garrisons would allow the French army to occupy the Southern Netherlands' territory in just a couple of days, and made clear that there was insufficient money to hire more soldiers, as Vienna required<sup>(25)</sup>. In December 1733, Jean De Witt (1694-1751), active in the Flemish *Chambre des Comptes*, handed over a remarkably clear survey of the public finances in the Southern Netherlands, based on average data for the last three or more years. This survey had been made at the request of Vienna<sup>(26)</sup>. Thus both the Brussels' government and Vienna were well aware of the financial exhaustion. The Marquis of Rialp even remarked that in Vienna these regions were seen as "a well without water"<sup>(27)</sup>. The awareness of the links between war and state finances in the heads of leading statesmen, is one aspect of what has recently been called the fiscal-military state<sup>(28)</sup>. The expansion and sophistication of tax systems and administration

proposals, in: HHStA, *Berichte*, 35. Some of Harrach's proposals were not put into effect, such as his plan to establish a state bank in order to reduce the interest rates for loans, or his plan to give the port of Ostend a statute similar to that of a free port: HHStA, *Berichte*, 35 and 37: Harrach to Rialp, 25 June 1734 and 7 December 1736.

(24) HHStA, *Depeschen*, 13b: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, five dispatches, 19 November 1735. These ordered respectively (1) savings in the military, (2) abolition of useless offices, reduction of tax exemptions, sale of unrewarding domains, temporarily reduced payments of pensions and salaries, reduced payments for the household of the governor-general and the barrier subsidies, (3) abolition of military and civil offices, (4) measures to boost internal and foreign trade, and (5) investigations into monetary politics. The enforcement of these orders, however, did not go without a hitch, as shown by the repeated promulgation of some of them: Brussels, Algemeen Rijksarchief [henceforth ARA], Departement van de Nederlanden van de Hof- en Staatskanselarij te Wenen [henceforth DN], 323, f. 66v.-69: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 28 April 1736.

(25) Cf. HHStA, *Berichte*, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 16 October 1733; AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 9 and 19 January and 26 March 1734; HHStA, GK, 89a: Harrach to Eugene of Savoy, 25 January 1735.

(26) J.-B. WINDEY, *De Raad van Financiën*, *op. cit.*, p. 350-351 and p. 467-476. All biographical data on the office-holders in the Brussels and Viennese administrations are, if not otherwise indicated, based on: Claude BRUNEEL in coll. with Jean-Paul HOYOIS, *Les grands commis du gouvernement des Pays-Bas autrichiens. Dictionnaire biographique du personnel des institutions centrales*, Brussels, Archives générales du Royaume, 2001.

(27) AVA, FH, 576: Rialp to Harrach, 7 July 1734: "(...) comme un puy sans eau".

(28) Christopher STORRS, "Introduction: The Fiscal-Military State in the 'Long' Eighteenth Century", in Christopher STORRS, ed., *The Fiscal-Military State in Eighteenth-Century Europe. Essays in Honour of P.G.M. Dickson*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, p. 1-22.

in these fiscal-military states are supposed to be driven by warfare demands. The chronology of this development and the specific details of the concept are still a matter of debate. Some scholars even note that financing warfare, defence and armed forces sometimes led to stripping the state of some of its functions, rather than strengthening them<sup>(29)</sup>. Whatever the outcome in specific polities, it is clear that in the Austrian Netherlands, and by extension the eighteenth-century Austrian monarchy, state reforms were driven by the search for more money for the army<sup>(30)</sup>.

The financial problems were, in Harrach's eyes, aggravated by the lack of able office-holders in the Council of Finance and the *Chambres des Comptes*. Shortly after his arrival in Brussels, he started complaining about the many incompetent officials who hindered an efficient management of the state finances, and advised the emperor to replace the old and sickly head of the Council of Finance<sup>(31)</sup>. However, Harrach thought no better of the replacement, the new *trésorier-général ad interim* Marc de Fonseca (1678-1743)<sup>(32)</sup>. Because of the poor quality of the council's staff – he stated that many offices had been given to the highest bidder – it was impossible to get a clear insight into the actual conditions of the royal treasuries, and many of the institution's tasks remained unexecuted, according to his reports<sup>(33)</sup>. This dissatisfaction with the councillors was not entirely new, though. Governor-general ad interim Wirich von Daun (1669-1741) had denounced the lack of competent personnel in 1725<sup>(34)</sup>. Even the emperor had voiced his discontent over the years and continued to do so, undoubtedly because the council was manned by elderly and sickly people and had failed to draft a clear survey of the public finances<sup>(35)</sup>. Moreover, not only the Council of Finance, but also the *Chambres des Comptes*, mainly the Brabant one, worried the grand maître<sup>(36)</sup>. Harrach's complaints even related to the Privy Council and the

(29) Benno TESCHKE, "Revisiting the "War-Makes-States" Thesis: War, Taxation and Social Property Relations in Early Modern Europe", in Olaf ASBACH & Peter SCHRÖDER, eds., *War, the State and International Law in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010, p. 35-59. Specifically for the province of Luxembourg: Guy THEWES, *Stände, Staat und Militär. Versorgung und Finanzierung der Armee in den Österreichischen Niederlanden, 1715-1795*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 2012, p. 270-315.

(30) Michael HOCHEDLINGER, "The Habsburg Monarchy: From 'Military-Fiscal State' to 'Militarization'", in C. STORRS, ed., *The Fiscal-Military State, op. cit.*, p. 55-94.

(31) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 10 February 1733.

(32) AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 5 June 1733.

(33) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 20 and 24 February and 3 March 1733; HHStA, Große Korrespondenz [henceforth GK], 88b and AVA, FH, 585: Harrach to Eugene of Savoy, 7 and 21 April 1733; AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 2 September 1733 and 29 March 1734.

(34) J.-B. WINDEY, *De Raad van Financiën, op. cit.*, p. 15.

(35) HHStA, Depeschen, 11: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 8 July and 9 December 1730 and 17 February 1731; HHStA, Depeschen, 13a, ARA, DN, 322, f. 111v.-112v. and HHStA, Depeschen, 13b: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 14 July and 27 October 1734 and 26 October 1735. The first time the emperor explicitly noted that a change in personnel was needed was in the autumn 1733: HHStA, Depeschen, 12: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 10 October 1733.

(36) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 17 April and 27 June 1733; AVA, FH, 579: Harrach to Roccaberti, 5 May 1733.

secretariats in Brussels. "It seems a study has been made so as to staff every institution with bad subjects", he lamented in 1734<sup>(37)</sup>.

As the first step in the solution Harrach suggested appointing Karl Ferdinand von Königsegg-Erps (1696-1759) as head of the Council of Finance. According to him, the count possessed the necessary capacities and enjoyed enough authority and credit in the Netherlands. After all, he was a member of the Estates of Brabant. This appointment would help strengthen the council, which Harrach called a mere skeleton in which councillor Charles François de Quickelberghe, without being brilliant, was the only one actually working. Harrach compared him to the proverbial one-eyed man in the country of the blind<sup>(38)</sup>. Furthermore, ominous rumours of a scramble for positions, by which Fonseca would give up his post as trésorier-général in favour of audiençier François Gaston de Cuvelier (1661-1743), had reached Harrach. Cuvelier's office would then be manned by Fonseca's son<sup>(39)</sup>. Harrach held the governor-general partly responsible for this poor state of the government. Favouritism prevailed when Maria Elisabeth conferred functions and talents were hardly taken into account. For example, Jean François d'Aubertin, a member of the Flemish Chambre des Comptes, had received a commission to inspect the accounts of the *Châtellenie* of Ypres, the district around the city of the same name. Harrach considered Aubertin inapt for this task – he did not even possess knowledge of the Flemish language in which these accounts were written – and fruitlessly tried to persuade the archduchess to appoint someone else<sup>(40)</sup>. Such complaints are all the more important because Maria Elisabeth had been given very extensive powers. Her instructions allowed her to appoint officials up to the presidents of the provincial councils, provincial governors or members of the central government institutions in Brussels, and clerics up to abbots and bishops, almost without interference from Vienna. Recent research confirms that she really did use these powers and that she actively engaged in the selection of state personnel<sup>(41)</sup>.

As a consequence, Friedrich August started to press for a change in personnel. Incompetent officials had to be replaced. At the end of 1733 he wrote: "The Viscount de Vooght has spared us, by his death, the trouble of eliminating him from the council, the Viscount of Brussels will possibly do the same in the near future. It would be desirable if we could get rid of the

(37) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 14 August and 14 October 1733; 35: Harrach to Rialp, 26 February 1734: "Enfin il semble qu'on ait fait un étude à part, pour garnir tout, de meauvais sujets".

(38) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 24 March and 20 October 1733 and HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 22 January 1734. Cuvelier judged Quickelberghe very negatively: AVA, FH, 503: Cuvelier to Harrach, 21 February 1733.

(39) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 10 April 1733; cf. ARA, DN, 85, f. 190-196: Fonseca to Rialp, 6 July 1734.

(40) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 4 September 1733.

(41) E. KOVÁCS, ed., *Instruktionen und Patente*, op. cit., p. 197-301 (Instruction: chapter I, clauses 4 and 8 and chapter II, clause 8; Secret Instruction, clauses 14 and 16); cf. S. HERTEL, *Maria Elisabeth*, op. cit., p. 203; J. LEFÈVRE, *Documents concernant le Recrutement de la haute Magistrature dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens au dix-huitième siècle*, Brussels, Palais des Académies, 1939, p. 18-19; Ghislaine DE BOOM, "L'archiduchesse Marie-Élisabeth et les grands maîtres de la Cour", in *RBPH*, vol. 5, 1926, p. 493-506.

others as cheaply”<sup>(42)</sup>. In the same weeks he discussed the topic with Maria Elisabeth, only to realize that she was not willing to dismiss the councillors Aubertin and Pierre (de) Strozzi, or Jean Guillaume van de Velde in the Flemish *Chambre des Comptes*. The last thing she wanted was for them to become formally *réformés* (‘reformed’), which meant they were more or less discharged or retired, but retained (part of) their pay. She pleaded for them to be allowed to continue receiving payments and retain their functions, but without having to perform their duties. For Harrach, this was hard to reconcile with his conscience, but for the moment he had no other choice. He ascribed Maria Elisabeth’s wishes to her goodness: she simply could not refuse anything to those who had good relations with, for example, her ladies-in-waiting. Aubertin was the lover of one of them<sup>(43)</sup>, while van de Velde had been one of the archduchess’ chamberlains<sup>(44)</sup>. In Harrach’s opinion, they all took advantage of her magnanimity<sup>(45)</sup>.

Getting rid of these office-holders was, however, not his only pursuit. The second important step was to search for worthy replacements, which proved to be a difficult hurdle to clear as well. Friedrich August feared the influence of the so-called *Clique de la Cour*, an umbrella term under which he grouped all of Maria Elisabeth’s favourites. What was needed, according to Harrach, were some twelve competent and hard-working individuals for the *Chambres des Comptes*, a worthy trésorier-général and some extra colleagues for Quickelberghe and De Witt, the latter having made the switch-over from one of the *Chambres* to the Council of Finance only some weeks earlier<sup>(46)</sup>.

The measures Friedrich August pleaded for are comparable to the reforms his father Aloys Thomas tried to introduce as viceroy in the Kingdom of Naples between 1728 and 1733. The start of Aloys’ service was in certain respects similar to that of his son in Brussels: the Neapolitan fiscal exhaustion hung like the sword of Damocles over all government activities. Moreover, the viceregal authority had been weakened. Aloys von Harrach resolutely replaced incompetent figures in the central judicial and financial institutions, usually by enforced retirement but with continued salary. Notwithstanding some successes, he did not manage to halt the omnipresent venality. For several years, Vienna had demanded clear surveys of revenues and expenditure in the Kingdom of Naples, attempted to tackle the widespread smuggling and experimented with establishing the *Banco di San Carlo*, based on the Viennese *Stadtbank* and *Universal-Bancalität*. However, most of these projects failed because of the combined opposition of the landed aristocracy, the Spanish-

(42) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 4 November 1733: “Le Vicomte de Voght nous at éppagné, en mourant, la peine de la refformer, le Vicomte de Bruxelles en fera peut être bientôt de mèmme. Il seroit à souhaitter que nous puissions être quittes des autres à aussi bon marché”.

(43) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 14 November 1733.

(44) C. BRUNEEL collab. J.-P. HOYOIS, *Les grands commis*, op. cit., p. 615.

(45) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 13 November 1733.

(46) HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 23 February, 4 June and 7 August 1734. A sketch of the talents of the councillors of Finance and the members of the *Chambres des Comptes*, in: HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 28 July 1734, with table attached. A proposal for replacements in the Privy Council: HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 19 October 1734.

Italian faction at court in Vienna – especially through the influential Spanish Council – and the *Kollateral*, the central governmental and judicial body in Naples<sup>(47)</sup>. His father's activities in Naples certainly inspired Friedrich August, who asked the viceroy for advice on reconstructing the Southern Netherlands' public finances. Aloys recommended that his son employ gifted personnel and merge all the treasuries into one<sup>(48)</sup>.

### Faction struggle around the intendant question

As mentioned above, Harrach felt thwarted by the Clique de la Cour. Many advisory institutions had a say in the decision-making process, but Harrach was convinced that a coherent group was opposing his plans. The link between these figures was, in his opinion, the court around Maria Elisabeth. Not only the aforementioned Aubertin favoured because he was the lover of one of her ladies-in-waiting, the same held true for a certain Castel St. Pietro, who was appointed assistant major of the city of Brussels. Despite the emperor focusing on capacities, this was but one of many examples of favouritism, said Harrach<sup>(49)</sup>. Other persons in the court circle that he regarded as having great influence on Maria Elisabeth were her private secretary Johannes Matthias Ludovisi, her confessor Stephan Amiodt, her chambermaid Maria Anna Capellini and her ladies-in-waiting<sup>(50)</sup>. In the course of 1734, Ludovisi managed to take over many of the tasks of the audiençier, who was employed in the High Council for the Netherlands in Vienna at the same time. As a result, Ludovisi could control access to the governor-general to the disadvantage of Harrach and to the advantage of Cuvelier, according to Sandra Hertel<sup>(51)</sup>.

In general, the grand maître struggled with his relationship with Maria Elisabeth. He clearly felt like an outsider from her group of favourites, and more than once complained about the difficulties of convincing her not to show them preference. For these reasons, he even asked if he could write about delicate matters in a separate postscript that she would not get to see, "because I [Harrach] have to take all imaginable caution to preserve the confidence of this Princess, without which I would be nothing more than a zero here"<sup>(52)</sup>. Some years later, he even noted: "I would like to have only

(47) Peter STENITZER, "Das Wirken Aloys Thomas R. Graf Harrachs als Vizekönig von Neapel (1728-1733)", in Silvia CASSANI, ed., *Barock in Neapel. Kunst zur Zeit der österreichischen Vizekönige*, Naples, Electa Napoli, 1993, p. 43-55.

(48) AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 21 November 1732.

(49) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 2 September 1733.

(50) Harrach summoned Amiodt at least twice to stress that he had to make use of being in Maria Elisabeth's confidence to further Harrach's plans rather than hinder them: AVA, FH, 578: Rialp to Harrach, 4 January 1736; P. LENDERS, "Les conceptions politiques", *art. cit.*, p. 137-141.

(51) Examples of Harrach's complaints against the Clique de la Cour: HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 25 June and 24 September 1734. Cf. P. LENDERS, "Les conceptions politiques", *art. cit.*, p. 104-111 and 115-118; S. HERTEL, *Maria Elisabeth, op. cit.*, p. 307-308 (Ludovisi) and *passim* (Amiodt).

(52) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 19 August 1733: "(...) car je dois prendre tous les ménagements imaginables, pour conserver la confiance de cette Auguste Princesse, sans quoy je ne serois icy plus qu'un O en chiffre".

three months the authority to make this ministry act, and the authority to take decisions myself, to show this Princess [Maria Elisabeth] that nothing is easier, than to settle cases with a certain speed. But it is a vain effort to inspire her to activity, and even more to get her to really think about the welfare of the service, as soon as one of her ladies-in-waiting has an interest in some case, directly or indirectly”<sup>(53)</sup>. Nevertheless, the following paragraphs will demonstrate that she really did listen to his suggestions and that she thought highly of his opinion<sup>(54)</sup>.

The first official whose ideas greatly diverged from Harrach's, was trésorier-général ad interim Marc de Fonseca. Fonseca presented his own reform plan, which he had made in collaboration with Juste Jacques Bervoet (1678-1757), a member of the Great Council of Malines, the supreme court in the Southern Netherlands<sup>(55)</sup>. This project consisted of merging the Council of State, Privy Council and Council of Finance into one body, and the introduction of intendants. This mirrored the institutional reforms during the short Angevin Regime, which lasted from the end of 1700 until 1706 in the provinces of Brabant and Flanders<sup>(56)</sup>. Harrach opposed this plan out of pragmatism. In his eyes, the complete reorganization of the central institutional apparatus in Brussels would take too much time. It was not so much the structural set-up of the system that mattered to him, but the capacities of the office-holders<sup>(57)</sup>. He tried to convince Maria Elisabeth of his views, underlining that the intendants would be an expensive group of officials, without any guarantee that they would be able to end all embezzlement. In addition, their introduction ran counter to local privileges and age-old customs. Instead, he proposed temporary inspection agents<sup>(58)</sup>. That same pragmatism, however, led him to reconcile himself with the intendants, should the emperor order their establishment. The only condition he made in this case, was that the merits of the candidates be taken into account<sup>(59)</sup>. In line with his views, however, the governor-general, when she sent Fonseca's plan to Vienna, noted that its

(53) HHStA, Berichte, 38: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 14 November 1738: “Je voudrais seulement avoir pendant trois mois l'autorité de faire agir le ministère, et celle de résoudre par moi même pour montrer à cette S(erenissi)me Princesse qu'il n'y a rien de si aisé, que de faire aller les affaires d'un certain train, mais c'est peines perdues, que de lui inspirer de l'activité, et encore plus, de lui faire naître un vrai gout pour le bien du service, dès qu'il y a l'intérêt d'une de ces femmes de chambres qui concoure dans une affaire, soit directement soit indirectement”.

(54) Shortly before her death, she passed a mainly positive judgment on Harrach: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Handschriftensammlung CVP, 6411, f. 158-159: Maria Elisabeth to her sister Maria Magdalena, 23 June 1741.

(55) On Fonseca: Anna CORETH, “Persönlichkeit und Aktennachlass des Marc Deffonseca”, in *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, vol. 28, 1975, p. 89-114.

(56) For more information on the Angevin Regime and its legacy in the first years of the Austrian government: Klaas VAN GELDER, “L'empereur Charles VI et « l'héritage anjouin » dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux (1716-1725)”, in *Revue d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 58, 2011, 1, p. 53-79.

(57) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 17 July 1733.

(58) ARA, DN, 615: Harrach to Maria Elisabeth, 5 July 1734.

(59) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 21 July, 25 August and 14 and 30 October 1733. In that last letter, Harrach considered some possible intendants, although he also wrote that the names of these functionaries were hated in the country.



maxims, reflecting the Angevin reforms of 1702 and the system that operated from 1718 until 1725, had been revoked by the emperor in that last year<sup>(60)</sup>.

In spite of his *Expediens*, Harrach started to convene with Fonseca in order to present a single plan with a single list of officials who could staff the governmental apparatus. Getting rid of the archduchess' favourites Aubertin, van de Velde and Strozzi by reforming them was one of his priorities<sup>(61)</sup>. Maria Elisabeth thought highly of Harrach's search for talent, but she strongly urged the emperor to give these three men, as well as Jean Remacle de Thisquen, secretary and honorary councillor of Finance, half or all their salary, or other benefits, in the future. So she proposed the new office of 'Intendant of the Royal Buildings in the Netherlands' for Strozzi, although she admitted that Strozzi and Thisquen were not of great value in the administration<sup>(62)</sup>.

Harrach's main opponent became François Gaston de Cuvelier (1658-1743), audencier since 1718 and member of the High Council for the Netherlands since 1732<sup>(63)</sup>. In 1733, he presented the emperor with a plan for reconstructing the public finances in the Southern Netherlands. Just like Harrach's *Expediens*, it dealt with a whole range of topics, from conversion of public debt and boosting commerce to government savings and institutional adaptations. At its core was the introduction of intendants<sup>(64)</sup>. This proposal triggered a genuine showdown between the two men. It began in 1733, with the grand maître alarmed by the possible implementation of Cuvelier's plan, and completely escalated after Charles VI openly supported it. Harrach's letters show his frustration and his fear of opposition from the estates<sup>(65)</sup>. He warned of the dire consequences if the estates were to stop granting taxes, especially in the precarious political situation with the war

(60) HHStA, Berichte, 23: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 28 August 1733 (Fonseca's plan attached) and 1 October 1734. For reflections on his own plan: ARA, DN, 85, f. 134-137 and 83, f. 307-312: Fonseca to Rialp, 21 and 28 August 1733. For the 1725 institutional reframing: Klaas VAN GELDER & Sandra HERTEL, "Die Mission des Grafen von Daun in Brüssel 1725. Ein Wendepunkt in der Regierung der Österreichischen Niederlande?", in *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, vol. 38, 2011, 3, p. 405-439.

(61) HHStA, Berichte, 34: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 6 and 17 November and 1 December 1733. Fonseca's views on their meetings in: ARA, DN, 85 f. 146-151v.: Fonseca to Rialp, 10 November 1733.

(62) HHStA, Berichte, 23: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 14 November 1733.

(63) Jan-Baptist WINDEY, "Cuvelier, François Gaston graaf de", in *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, Brussels, Paleis der Academiën, 1972, vol. 5, col. 268-272; C. HENIN, *La charge d'audencier*, *op. cit.*, p. 106-108. Catherine Henin has not consulted Windey's aforementioned notice, nor Lenders' articles on Harrach's ministry. Therefore, she fails to take into account the tensions between Harrach and Cuvelier.

(64) Joseph CUVELIER, "Le redressement des Finances de la Belgique au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle d'après un mémoire du comte François-Gaston de Cuvelier à l'empereur Charles VI", in *Bulletin de la Commission royale d'Histoire*, vol. 107, 1942, p. 157-198 (which gives a very flattering picture of the author's namesake); H. HASQUIN, "Les intendants", *art. cit.*, p. 189-197. Two versions of the text proposed by Cuvelier can be found in: ARA, Raad van Financiën, 8541-8542.

(65) HHStA, Berichte, 34 and 35: Harrach to Rialp, 1 January and 16 February 1734, and Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 10 June 1733, 3 and 26 March and 31 August 1734, and excerpts of letters in P. LENDERS, "Les conceptions politiques", *art. cit.*, p. 112-133. On the faction struggle between both men, from a court historian perspective: S. HERTEL, *Maria Elisabeth*, *op. cit.*, p. 302-319.

raging between France and Austria, and the low numbers of soldiers in the vulnerable Southern Netherlands. In his eyes, a general revolt was even to be expected<sup>(66)</sup>. The grand maître portrayed Cuvelier as a thief, enjoying the blind confidence of the governor-general thanks to his excellent relationship with Ludovisi, Capellini and her ladies-in-waiting. According to Harrach, these facts had persuaded the emperor to remove Cuvelier from Brussels and call him to Vienna, but at court he had somehow managed to regain the confidence of the emperor, while at the same time Maria Elisabeth wanted him as the new trésorier-général<sup>(67)</sup>.

Cuvelier's appointment was Harrach's worst nightmare, but it came true. In November 1734, he received the news that Cuvelier had been appointed trésorier-général of the Council of Finance, while still maintaining the office and salary of the audencier. This must have been a serious blow for the grand maître, who foresaw that Cuvelier would establish his 'creatures' in all the important posts<sup>(68)</sup>. Nevertheless, he reacted laconically: "Yesterday, Mr. Cuvelier was declared trésorier-général, and the son of Count de Fonseca councillor of Finance. The only things still to do in order to make the court clique omnipotent is to appoint Thisquen to the Council of Finance, Aubertin as general tax collector, and Ludovici as audencier"<sup>(69)</sup>. Rialp tried to reassure the agitated Harrach that his authority was not at stake<sup>(70)</sup>. Although Maria Elisabeth was hardly a hardliner when it came to intendants – already in 1729 she had urged for moderation, taking into account the Southern Netherlands' resistance to the plan<sup>(71)</sup> – Harrach was suspicious of her favouritism towards Cuvelier. He eagerly searched for men who could help him to persuade her of the value of his own propositions<sup>(72)</sup>. Nonetheless, as long as Cuvelier resided in Brussels and had a say in many affairs, he believed his reforms would be useless and the archduchess would remain susceptible to Cuvelier's ideas. He believed that only his opponent's physical removal would solve this state of affairs. Therefore, he proposed giving Cuvelier the commission to negotiate with the Dutch in Antwerp, where the conference for a trade agreement had been dragging on<sup>(73)</sup>.

(66) HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 9 April 1734; AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 6 April 1734.

(67) AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 13 April 1734.

(68) For a while, it seemed Cuvelier would be able to have his grandson appointed in one of the Chambres des Comptes, but Harrach did not consider him fit for the job: HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 19 January 1734.

(69) HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 5 November 1734: "Hier Mr. de Cuviglier à été déclaré trésorier general, et le fils du Comte Deffonseca conseiller des finances, il ne reste maintenant plus pour mètre le comble à la clique de Cour, que de voir Tisquen pareillement élevé à la place de Conseiller des finances, Aubertain à celle de Receveur general, et Ludovici à celle d'Audencier". For Harrach's turmoil, cf. letter of 16 December 1734 from Harrach to (presumably) Rialp in the same file, as well as: AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 30 April 1734.

(70) AVA, FH, 576: Rialp to Harrach, 28 April 1734.

(71) L.-P. GACHARD, *ROPBA*, Brussels, Fr. Gobbaerts, 1873, vol. 3, p. LVI-LVII.

(72) HHStA, Berichte, 36: Harrach to Rialp, 18 May and 3 June 1735; Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 11 November 1735.

(73) HHStA, Berichte, 36: Harrach to Rialp, 25 and 29 November and 6, 9 and 16 December 1735.

However, Cuvelier was not alone in his opinion. For many years the High Council for the Netherlands had supported the introduction of the intendants and *subdélégués*, assistants to the intendants, although the name '*intendants*' was replaced with '*commissaires*' in the course of 1734 due to strategic reasons<sup>(74)</sup>. The High Council was the Viennese body responsible for examining all political and financial matters of the Southern Netherlands, and for giving the emperor written advice. Harrach distrusted this institution enormously. He accused it of plotting to ruin the Southern Netherlands and suspected that Cuvelier was working hand in glove with the council, especially with its president Juan Antonio de Baxador, Viscount of Roccaberti and Count of Savalla (1673-1743)<sup>(75)</sup>. "The High Council for the Netherlands in Vienna has taken away all my freedom, so that I am of no use here, the only thing to do is to bear witness to all the peculiar preparations that these people want to make here, in the meantime everything perishes", he complained<sup>(76)</sup>. One of his arguments was that the judgment of the Brussels-based officials was more reliable than that of the councillors in Vienna, far away from the situation they were dealing with<sup>(77)</sup>. Unfortunately, today's historians mostly only have available the final advice or consults of this institution, not of the opinions of its individual members. Therefore, usually it is unclear to what extent their views diverged. Thanks to his correspondence, Charles-Philippe (de) Pattyn (1687-1773), a member of the High Council since August 1733, can be identified as being very ill-disposed towards the intendants<sup>(78)</sup>. Königsegg-Erps likewise supported Harrach's opinion (cf. *infra*). I could not find similar references for the other councillors<sup>(79)</sup>.

(74) ARA, DN, 583 and 615: consults of the High Council for the Netherlands [henceforth HCN], 21 September 1733 and 11 March 1734. On this council: R. ZEDINGER, *Die Verwaltung*, op. cit., p. 30-95; K. VAN GELDER, *Regime Change*, op. cit., chapter 5 of the manuscript.

(75) Cf. HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 31 August, 3 and 16 September and 19 November 1734. In the course of the months, Harrach started to depict the attitude of the High Council in terms of enmity, with the council pursuing his fall: HHStA, Berichte, 35 and 36: Harrach to Rialp, 21 December 1734 and 4 January 1735. Even before this, Rialp had exhorted him to adopt more moderate language in his correspondence with the council: HHStA, Berichte, 35: Rialp to Harrach, 15 September 1734.

(76) HHStA, GK, 88b: Harrach to Eugene of Savoy, 16 December 1734: "Der Niderländische Rath zu Wienn hat mir die handt abgeronnen (sic) [abgerungen?], also den ich dermahlen alhir zu nichts nutz bin, als einen Zeug von allen wunderlichen anstalten abzugeben die diese leuthe hier machen wollen, entzwischen gehet alles zu grund (...)"

(77) AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 12 October 1734.

(78) AVA, FH, 568: Pattyn to Harrach, 28 April 1734, 2 February, 9 September and 12 October 1735 and undated *Reflexions*. In that third letter, Pattyn calls Cuvelier a "dangerous man" ["homme dangereux"]. Cf. ARA, DN, 615: *Memoire du Conseiller Regent Pattyn au sujet...*; L.-P. GACHARD, *ROPBA*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. LX, footnote 3.

(79) In 1733, Roccaberti expressed his fear for the consequences of the reform plan Fonseca defended, although in vague terms: HHStA, Belgien DD B – blaue Nummer, 13, f. 7-10v.: Roccaberti to Harrach, 29 July 1733. Some months later, however, he supported the emperor's decision and criticized too compliant an attitude towards the estates: AVA, FH, 579: Roccaberti to Harrach, 17 May 1725. It seems to me that Roccaberti never developed a clear opinion on the reforms. According to Pattyn, he changed his mind early in 1735 and then started to act against Cuvelier: AVA, FH, 568: Pattyn to Harrach, 18 May 1735.

In line with the opinion of the High Council, in March 1734 an imperial edict was promulgated, ordering the merger of both *Chambres des Comptes*, the reorganization of the Council of Finance and the appointment of seven *conseillers commissaires* and ten *subdélégués* in the provinces – the term ‘intendants’ was wisely omitted<sup>(80)</sup>. The High Council and the group around Cuvelier and Fonseca thus seemed to have won the day. However, Pattyn reacted with great disappointment and complained that he had been completely debarred from participating in the deliberations inside the High Council<sup>(81)</sup>. He was not the only one worried. Maria Elisabeth decided to suspend the execution of the orders until after the estates had granted the extraordinary taxes that had been demanded. Apparently, rumours of the plans had already spread and alarmed the Estates of Flanders, the province usually granting the highest amount of tax money. She also referred to the ongoing war between France and Austria and her wish not to needlessly disturb the estates<sup>(82)</sup>. From this moment on, she postponed the plan for intendants indefinitely<sup>(83)</sup>. Eventually, the plan was abandoned altogether<sup>(84)</sup>.

On July 5, 1734, Maria Elisabeth convened the *Jointe de Cabinet*, an informal advisory body with a changing composition depending on expertise in specific dossiers<sup>(85)</sup>. In the run-up to this Jointe, Harrach urged a thorough re-examination of the consequences of the intendant plan, which went against the privileges and customs of the country. He clearly moved into gear, and warned Rialp that the mere replacement of the word ‘intendant’ with ‘commissaire’ would not mislead the Southern Netherlanders<sup>(86)</sup>. During the meeting, six of the seven ministers opposed the plan, with Fonseca the only one in favour<sup>(87)</sup>. Instead of commissaries in permanent residence, the

(80) The original edict of 17 March 1734 and the planned instructions for the *conseillers commissaires* and *subdélégués* can be found in: HHStA, Depeschen, 12.

(81) AVA, FH, 568: Pattyn to Harrach, 24 and 31 March 1734.

(82) HHStA, Berichte, 23 and ARA, DN, 615: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 13 March and 2 April 1734.

(83) From time to time she summoned both Harrach and Cuvelier to form her opinion on the basis of theirs: cf. HHStA, Berichte, 24 and ARA, DN, 615: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 3 May and 10 June 1735.

(84) The High Council reacted unhappily to the postponement and reformulated its wish for intendants as the only means to overcome the financial chaos: ARA, DN, 615: consult HCN, 27 August 1734.

(85) Michel BAELE & Jan-Baptist WINDEY, “De « Jointe de Cabinet » tijdens de landvoogdij van Maria Elisabeth (1725-1741)”, in *Archief- en Bibliotheekwezen in België. Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique*, vol. 43, 1972, 1-2, p. 85-107.

(86) HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 27 April 1734 and Harrach to Rialp, 14 May 1734. Rialp, by contrast, did not believe that ancient privileges and intendants were irreconcilable: AVA, FH, 576: Rialp to Harrach, 17 April 1734.

(87) The attendant ministers were Harrach, head of the Privy Council Coloma, Chancellor of Brabant d'Eesbeeck van der Haghen, President of the Great Council of Malines van Volden, Privy councillor Steenhault, head of the *Chambre des Comptes* Fraula, and Fonseca as head of the Council of Finance: ARA, DN, 615: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 9 July 1734. The individual opinions of these men, with the exception of Fraula's and van Volden's, can be found in ARA, DN, 615. Cuvelier regretted that the Jointe consisted almost exclusively of jurists for this meeting, with hardly anyone familiar with state finances. He insinuated that this would have changed the outcome: ARA, DN, 85, f. 198-201: Fonseca to Rialp, 6 July 1734.

majority considered it wiser employ temporary functionaries with a specific commission to inspect the finances of one city or district, as had been the case with the highly insolvent city of Ghent in 1734. The Ghent aldermen had certainly not been happy with this inspection and the consequent *règlement* prescribing a stricter financial regime. But at least this commission, executed by the above-mentioned Bervoet, had not led to generalized discontent or unrest, as was expected with the intendants<sup>(88)</sup>. The result of the Jointe caused Harrach to reflect that it was better to govern this land as the Spanish had done before, rather than adopt the French model<sup>(89)</sup>.

In the meantime, perhaps because he considered attack the best form of defence, Harrach had provided the emperor with his *Expediens*. Charles VI demanded extra clarifications and considered a few of the proposals as unsuitable, but generally he gave the *Expediens* a positive assessment<sup>(90)</sup>. In December, the *Geheime Konferenz*, the supreme advisory body for the whole Austrian monarchy, tackled the problem as well. When dealing with questions on the Southern Netherlands, this ministerial gathering usually based itself on a previously delivered consult of the High Council. It was no different this time, but the *Geheime Konferenz* dissociated itself from the views of the council. The ministers declared themselves in favour of the temporary commissioners. Their opinion was founded on the principle of maintaining the emperor's *dominio suave* so as not to disturb the estates and vassals and to maintain the political status quo<sup>(91)</sup>. On the basis of the consult of the *Konferenz*, Charles VI signed a second dispatch for the reforms on January 5, 1735. He ordered the commissaires and subdélégués to be introduced as in Ghent. Their range of duties could then be further broadened in the future, if necessary. He referred to his dispatch of March 17, 1734, regarding the reorganization of the Council of Finance and the *Chambre des Comptes*. As for the appointments, he left these to Maria Elisabeth, although she could contact him if she had any doubts, but with the shortest delay<sup>(92)</sup>.

Still, Harrach considered this a battle won, though not the entire war. He expected the *Clique de la Cour* to start lobbying in favour of its members to be included in the reformed Council of Finance and the unified *Chambre des Comptes*<sup>(93)</sup>. But on the other hand, he also observed a gradual mentality change. Maria Elisabeth's nomination of the promising Jean Daniel Schockaert and Jean Lambert d'Obin in the Privy Council, pleased him. He remarked that if this same attention had existed for the Council of Finance and the *Chambres des Comptes*, the financial situation of the Southern Netherlands would be better<sup>(94)</sup>. Another problem popped up, however: the

(88) Piet LENDERS, *Gent, een stad tussen traditie en verlichting (1750-1787)*. Een institutionele benadering, Courtray/Heule, UGA, 1990, p. 185-190.

(89) HHStA, Berichte, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 6 and 9 July 1734.

(90) HHStA, Depeschen, 13a: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 3 April and 7 July 1734.

(91) ARA, DN, 583: consult *Geheime Konferenz*, 19 December 1734. Attending ministers: Sinzendorf, Starhemberg, Aloys Harrach, Roccaberti and Rialp.

(92) HHStA, Depeschen, 13b: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 5 January 1735. For the dispatch of 17 March 1734, see footnote 80.

(93) HHStA, Berichte, 36: Harrach to Rialp, 18 January, 1 February and 1 March 1735; cf. AVA, FH, 568: Pattyn to Harrach, 30 April 1735.

(94) HHStA, Berichte, 36: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 6 January 1735.

archduchess deferred to issue the necessary decrees and stated she wanted to confer with Cuvelier on beforehand, much to the impatience of her grand maître. Moreover, the imperial decree of January 5 could be interpreted in twofold ways, so that the fear for intendants continued to dominate Harrach's mind<sup>(95)</sup>.

In June, the governor-general finally took the plunge and listed those to be appointed to the Council of Finance and the *Chambre des Comptes*. Surprisingly (or perhaps not), she also proposed Thisquen<sup>(96)</sup>. Harrach complained about her advice against appointing, for example, Pierre Bellanger († 1760), one of his own protégés<sup>(97)</sup>. Maria Elisabeth's letter with the list of people to be appointed also indicates that she chose to contact her brother, as foreseen in his last dispatch, and did not decide on the nominations independently. Intriguingly, the High Council had convened on the same topic in May to compare Harrach's proposals with those of Cuvelier and compile their own list of officials. In September the *Geheime Konferenz* did the same. This suggests that Vienna only wanted to give Maria Elisabeth the impression she was free to choose the new office-holders, although I did not find any document denying her powers in this respect<sup>(98)</sup>. The definitive imperial resolution on the appointments came in October, barely two weeks after the preliminary Peace of Vienna was signed between Austria and France<sup>(99)</sup>. Contrary to Maria Elisabeth's suggestions, van de Velde, Strozzi and Thisquen were not the list. However, they and others who were excluded from the reformed institutional apparatus would receive half their salary for life, or until they were appointed to some other function. The governor-general was very upset by the decision to remove most of her favourites from their offices. For several weeks, she even refused to make the dispatch public. Only in November did she sign the necessary decrees to implement the imperial orders<sup>(100)</sup>. Maria Elisabeth's indecisiveness and slowness in making decisions were legendary<sup>(101)</sup>. The aforementioned examples of the many postponements indicate the internal struggles between her inclinations and her conscience. For her, the whole reform programme had probably been a difficult ordeal, and perhaps even the reason why she progressively withdrew from political decision-making in the years afterwards<sup>(102)</sup>.

(95) HHStA, Berichte, 36: Harrach to Rialp, 1 and 29 April, 3 and 27 May and 30 August 1735.

(96) ARA, DN, 615: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 10 June 1735.

(97) HHStA, Berichte, 36: Harrach to Rialp, 10 June 1735; AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 10 June 1735.

(98) ARA, DN, 615 and 583: consults HCN and *Geheime Konferenz*, 6 May and 15 September 1735.

(99) HHStA, Depeschen, 13b: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 16 October 1735, with a copy of the decree to the Council of Finance, dated 7 November, appended. This decree has been edited in: L.-P. GACHARD, *ROPBA*, *op. cit.*, vol. 5, p. 77-80.

(100) HHStA, Berichte, 36: Harrach to Rialp, 25 and 28 October, and 1 and 9 November 1735.

(101) L.-P. GACHARD, *ROPBA*, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. xv-xvi. Rialp even asked the emperor to apply a little pressure on Maria Elisabeth: AVA, FH, 577: Rialp to Harrach, 11 May 1735.

(102) S. HERTEL, *Maria Elisabeth*, *op. cit.*, p. 211-214; The archduchess' internal struggles of conscience about the officials to be removed are apparent in: HHStA, Berichte, 36: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 14 June 1735.



So in the end, Harrach came off best. What is more, as far as I can see, the estates did not object to the reforms. Usually they tolerated adaptations to the central government system, as long as these did not shift the balance of power in their relations with the system. Now, these relations were potentially threatened by the unification of the *Chambres des Comptes* of Brabant and Flanders. The abolition of Brabant's *Chambre* went against the *Blijde Inkomste/Joyeuse Entrée*, the centuries-old constitutional charter of the duchy. But contrary to the unification of 1702 and the plans for unification in 1718, this time the Brabant estates did not raise any protests. This was probably because both *Chambres* were more or less transformed into separate and autonomous bureaus within the unified structure, albeit with a common head<sup>(103)</sup>. It should be stressed that Harrach always tried to maintain good relations with the estates. This does not mean that he was always understanding about their low tax grants, but he did acknowledge their vital role in the state machinery. More than once, he based his opposition to the intendants on the incompatibility with the regional privileges and customs, as mentioned above. Sometimes he explicitly referred to the relations between the monarch and the estates. He said that maintaining the estates' confidence was a precondition for getting higher taxes. He believed this confidence could only be gained by avoiding disputes with these representative institutions. Furthermore, he saw wise management of public finances as a prerequisite to persuading the estates to apply their credit for the service of the ruler<sup>(104)</sup>.

### Harrach's network in Vienna

As stated in the previous paragraphs, in the end the actual decisions for the reforms and the replacements were taken in Vienna, despite Maria Elisabeth's powers to appoint officials. Before the emperor made his resolution, the matter was debated in the High Council for the Netherlands and the *Geheime Konferenz*. The Viennese part of the decision-making process can be seen as the extension of the Brussels faction and power struggle. To achieve his goals, Friedrich August made an appeal to important power brokers such as Rialp, to his father Aloys Thomas, and to his own and his father's friends and

(103) Erik AERTS, *Geschiedenis en Archief van de Rekenkamers*, Brussels, Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1996, p. 146-148 and 155-160; ID., "Geünificeerde Rekenkamer (1735-1786 en 1791-1795)", in E. AERTS, M. BAELEDE et al., eds., *De centrale overheidsinstellingen*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 666-678. According to Aerts, Harrach wanted a complete merger and was not satisfied by the outcome of the amalgamation. Lenders mentions protests from the estates, but I have found no traces of this in the resolutions of the Estates of Brabant and Flanders: P. LENDERS, "Ontwikkeling van politiek en instellingen", art. cit., p. 46.

(104) HHStA, *Berichte*, 35: Harrach to Rialp, 25 June and 28 December 1734. In 1748 and 1749, Harrach was also the main opponent of the reforms introduced by Haugwitz, aimed at eroding the power of the estates in the Central European parts of the monarchy. He even presented counter-proposals to reconstruct the state finances on a different, estates-friendly footing: Ferd. MENČIK, "Kaiserin Maria Theresia und Friedrich Graf Harrach", in *Sitzungsberichte der königl. Böhmisches Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Classe für Philosophie, Geschichte und Philologie*, Jahrgang 1899, 1900, part VII, p. 1-18.

clients<sup>(105)</sup>. The extensive family correspondence conserved in Vienna has helped to establish how this network operated.

Friedrich's most important contact at the imperial court was probably the Marquis of Rialp. He was one of Charles VI's most important confidants. In addition, as Spanish Secretary of State, all contacts between the High Council for the Netherlands and the Council for Spain on the one hand, and the emperor on the other, passed through his hands. Furthermore, he frequently attended the meetings of the Geheime Konferenz. The huge amount of letters from Harrach to Rialp is the logical result of his position<sup>(106)</sup>. Rialp himself sometimes testifies to the fact that he spoke with the emperor about Harrach's proposals<sup>(107)</sup>. However, Rialp did not always share Harrach's ideas, as can be deduced from a letter of Aloys Thomas in which the latter warns his son against depicting the Spanish ministers too sharply in his correspondence. He reminded Friedrich that Rialp enjoyed much credit with the emperor, and that such wording was unlikely to please his majesty<sup>(108)</sup>. Moreover, Aloys was very displeased that his son's opposition to Cuvelier had developed into a full-blown power struggle with the entire High Council. Mindful of Rialp's credit and the public's favour towards Roccaberti, he predicted a bad outcome for Friedrich and reprimanded him<sup>(109)</sup>. At the beginning, Rialp considered Harrach's horror of Cuvelier as being completely unnecessary, but in the course of 1735 he himself became convinced that Cuvelier's position and Maria Elisabeth's blind confidence in him were harmful to the imperial service. From then on he urged Harrach to continue convincing the governor-general of his opinions over those of Cuvelier<sup>(110)</sup>. Understandably, Harrach's opponents also deemed Rialp a crucial knot in the web of decision making processes. Both Fonseca and Cuvelier fostered correspondence with the Spanish Secretary of State, and entrusted him with their plans and views on Harrach and his thoughts<sup>(111)</sup>. All in all, Rialp seems to have adopted a mediating role between both camps<sup>(112)</sup>.

Harrach's relations with Roccaberti seem superficial to me. Both men corresponded, but nowhere near to the extent that Harrach and Rialp did or

(105) Harrach also corresponded with his protector Eugene of Savoy, although the prince was elderly and gradually losing his influence in Vienna.

(106) On Rialp: Oskar SCHMID, "Marques Rialp und das spanische Staatssekretariat in Wien", in *Historische Blätter*, vol. 7, 1937, p. 52-60. Very significant is Aloys' remark that Rialp was "omnipotent", and that his support was indispensable for Friedrich's reforms: AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 30 January 1734: "(...) il est le tout puissant".

(107) Cf. AVA, FH, 576: Rialp to Harrach, 15 December 1734.

(108) AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 26 May 1734, cf. letter of 22 September 1734.

(109) AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 15 September 1734.

(110) HHStA, Belgien DD A – Depeschen, blaue Nummer, 2 and AVA, FH, 577: Rialp to Harrach, 18 August 1734 and 9 July 1735.

(111) Fonseca's letters to Rialp can be found in ARA, DN, 83 and 85, Cuvelier's letters in ARA, DN, 77. Cuvelier's letters illustrate his wish to cooperate harmoniously with Harrach, at least this is what he writes to Rialp several times. One letter nicely shows how Cuvelier criticized Harrach's vision of the reform: ARA, DN, 77, f° 7-8v.: Cuvelier to Rialp, 28 December 1734.

(112) Cf. AVA, FH, 576 and 577: Rialp to Harrach, 20 and 27 October 1734 and 29 January 1735.

Harrach and his father. Moreover, their letters rarely go beyond the obligatory courtesies and brief reflections on current dossiers<sup>(113)</sup>. On one occasion, Roccaberti explicitly and sharply rebuked Harrach's denunciations that the High Council was on a war footing with him. He reminded Friedrich that his complaints against Cuvelier did not equal the High Council as a whole, and that Cuvelier had always been a good servant of the body<sup>(114)</sup>. Moreover, Rialp urged the grand maître to cooperate harmoniously with the High Council, and to drop his criticism<sup>(115)</sup>. Roccaberti even seems to have complained that he was not sufficiently informed about the Southern Netherlands<sup>(116)</sup>.

Friedrich's second major addressee was his father, Aloys Thomas von Harrach. Aloys had left his office as viceroy of Naples at the end of 1733, and the following year he became a member of the Geheime Konferenz in Vienna<sup>(117)</sup>. Friedrich informed his father in detail about what was going on in the Southern Netherlands. His father sent fewer letters, but these were equally informative. Aloys' role was not confined to being informed and informing his son about what was happening behind the scenes of power. He passed on Friedrich's letters, memorandums and notes to specific officials in Vienna, such as Pattyn or Königsegg-Erps, both members of the High Council for the Netherlands at the time, or to Gundakar von Starhemberg (1663-1745) and Johann Christoph von Bartenstein (1690-1767) in the Geheime Konferenz<sup>(118)</sup>. Friedrich occasionally explicitly asked his father to do this, and recommended those men he trusted and held in high esteem, such as Pattyn<sup>(119)</sup>. But Aloys also acted independently. For example, he asked Field Marshal Joseph-Lothar von Königsegg-Rothenfels (1673-1751), a member of the Geheime Konferenz and of the *Hofkriegsrat* and an uncle of the aforementioned Königsegg-Erps, to talk to the emperor about the negative consequences of the intendants in the Southern Netherlands. The marshal thought it better not to do this, though<sup>(120)</sup>. Another official that Aloys talked to about the intendants in the Southern Netherlands was Bartenstein, secretary of the Geheime Konferenz and *Geheimer Staatssekretär* since 1733. At the time, Bartenstein dominated Austria's foreign politics and was an important powerbroker in Vienna as a result of enjoying Charles VI's confidence<sup>(121)</sup>.

Selecting these men was not incidental. On the contrary, it seems correct to speak of a coalition, perhaps even a (temporary) faction in the Viennese administration. The Harrachs had had excellent contacts with the Königsegg

(113) Roccaberti's letters to Rialp can be found in: AVA, FH, 579.

(114) AVA, FH, 579: Roccaberti to Harrach, 3 November 1734.

(115) AVA, FH, 576: Rialp to Harrach, two letters from 15 September 1734.

(116) AVA, FH, 503: Crumpipen to Harrach, 4 May 1735.

(117) Hermann KELLENBENZ, "Aloys (Louis) Thomas Raimund [Harrach]", in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, op. cit., p. 697-698.

(118) AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 24 March and 3 April 1734 and 29 June 1735.

(119) AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 5 January 1734 and 1 July 1735.

(120) AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 28 April 1734.

(121) AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 1 September 1734. On Bartenstein: Max BRAUBACH, "Bartenstein, Johann Christoph Frhr. v.", in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*. Bd. 1 : *Aachen – Behaim*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1953, p. 599-600.

family for many years<sup>(122)</sup>. Aloys von Harrach had even put in a good word for Königsegg-Erps with the emperor, so as to enhance his chances of being appointed to the High Council for the Netherlands<sup>(123)</sup>. In his letters, Königsegg-Erps seems to have shared Harrach's aversion for Cuvelier, but possibly more out of competition for a function in the administration rather than reasons of principle. He subtly remarked that he spoke and understood Flemish as well as French, which were essential for managing the finances, but doubted whether Cuvelier had any knowledge of the Flemish language<sup>(124)</sup>. More importantly, with his appointment to the High Council in 1735, the Harrachs now had a second ally in this previously hostile institution, alongside Pattyn. Pattyn gave Harrach an insight into the discussions within this advisory body on a regular basis. Once he was active as a councillor, Königsegg-Erps did the same, with the request to keep the revelations secret<sup>(125)</sup>. Königsegg-Erps also warned Aloys that the archduchess knew everything Friedrich wrote to Vienna. He hinted that his letters had been intercepted, probably with the help of one of his domestics<sup>(126)</sup>. As a result of the appointment of both Königsegg-Erps and Pattyn in the High Council, the final opinion of this body regarding the reforms changed remarkably. The consult dated July 21, 1735, even stresses the incompatibility of the functions of *trésorier-général* and *audiercier* in the hands of one man. At the end of the meeting, Königsegg-Erps, supported by what Pattyn had argued just before him, suggested removing Cuvelier as head of finances and replacing him with Marquis Ambroise Joseph de Herzelles (1680-1759)<sup>(127)</sup>. The contrast with the situation some months earlier, when Cuvelier still attended the Council's meetings, could hardly be more striking. Moreover, Pattyn did not content himself with working within the High Council. He actively lobbied with Rialp and even the emperor during several audiences, and made no secret of his aversion to Cuvelier's plans<sup>(128)</sup>.

(122) Aloys von Harrach and several members of the Königsegg family had known each other at least since their stay in the *Accademia Reale* in Turin, as part of their Grand Tour: Elisabeth GARMS-CORNIDES, "La percezione di Torino e dello stato sabaudo da parte di diplomatici imperiali e austriaci e viaggiatori provenienti dall'Austria", in Marco BELLABARBA & Andrea MERLOTTI, eds., *Stato Sabaudo e Sacro Romano Impero*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2014 (Annali dell'Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico in Trento. Quaderni, 92), p. 359-381. I want to thank professor Garms-Cornides for kindly providing me with the manuscript of this text.

(123) AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 15 January 1735. Friedrich's explicit testimony to his friendship with Königsegg-Erps (and with Pattyn) in: AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 27 May and 10 June 1735.

(124) AVA, FH, 545: Königsegg-Erps to Harrach, 12 January 1734.

(125) AVA, FH, 545: Königsegg-Erps to Harrach, 29 June 1735.

(126) AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 19 and 30 November 1735. Harrach responded that he was not concerned if the archduchess knew everything he wrote to Rialp: AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 27 December 1735.

(127) ARA, DN, 615: consult HCN, 21 July 1735; AVA, FH, 568: Pattyn to Harrach, 23 July 1735.

(128) AVA, FH, 568: Pattyn to Harrach, 26 May, 13 November and 1 December 1734 and 15 January 1735. On the eve of the final meeting of the *Geheime Konferenz* in October 1735, the emperor himself summoned Pattyn to discuss the matter: AVA, FH, 568: Pattyn to Harrach, 12 October 1735.

Thanks to Aloys von Harrach, the voting within the other advisory body, the Geheime Konferenz, could also be influenced in Friedrich's favour. Aloys tried to find allies for the reforms and informed Friedrich about the outcome of the meetings. At the end of 1734, he even attempted to postpone one meeting to make sure that Königsegg-Rothenfels would have time to get to Vienna and take part in the discussion. At the same time he confirmed to his son that Starhemberg would choose their side, whereas Philipp Ludwig von Sinzendorf (1671-1742), apparently an admirer of the French governing system, would vote the other way. He promised to put up a fierce defence of Harrach's case, but he feared that the majority of voices would vote against him, as Sinzendorff would probably fall in line with the views of Rialp and Roccaberti<sup>(129)</sup>. The outcome of the last gatherings of the Geheime Konferenz, however, indicate that Aloys' lobbying was successful.

### The aftermath of the reforms

In November 1735, in an audience with Maria Elisabeth, Cuvelier asked for permission to retire as trésorier-général and audiencier. Maria Elisabeth reacted emotionally, and condemned Harrach's tenacity in trying to remove the count from Brussels, which had been made possible thanks to the help of his father and some other ministers in Vienna. Moreover, she did not want to accept the resignation before having consulted the emperor, although Cuvelier almost begged Rialp to support his request with Charles VI<sup>(130)</sup>. Some months before, Cuvelier had indicated that he did not enjoy the authority required as a trésorier-général. He complained that he was not allowed to fully exercise his powers. He felt the structures within which he worked were frustrating his actions and that his reputation was unjustly being blackened at court<sup>(131)</sup>. These considerations may have prompted him to resign. Moreover, he must have felt that support for his position was crumbling, not only in Brussels, but in Vienna as well. The Geheime Konferenz had openly pleaded for removing Cuvelier from Brussels, since the discord with Harrach threatened the measures that needed to be taken. Even Roccaberti gradually sided against him<sup>(132)</sup>.

For Friedrich August, this news must have been a dream come true. Nevertheless, much to his despair, the archduchess once again waited several weeks before writing to her brother, and then afterwards before making known Charles' acceptance of the resignation. In the meanwhile, she was

(129) AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 27 November and 18 December 1734. In another letter, Aloys called Sinzendorff Cuvelier's protector: AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 15 September 1734.

(130) ARA, DN, 77, f. 76-77v., f. 91-92v. and f. 94-94v.: Cuvelier to Rialp, 19 October, 15 November and 20 December 1735; HHStA, Berichte, 24: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 16 December 1735.

(131) ARA, DN, 77, f. 61-62v., f. 64-67v.: Cuvelier to Rialp, 28 May and 29 June 1735. Harrach, on the contrary, asserted that he had given Cuvelier more freedom than any other functionary and accused him of ignoring the plurality of votes in the Council of Finance: HHStA, Berichte, 37: Harrach to Rialp, 6 March and 6 April 1736.

(132) ARA, DN, 583: consult Geheime Konferenz, 15 September 1735; AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 9 July 1735.

still thinking about ways to maintain Cuvelier. Harrach even considered presenting his own resignation if she continued to delay the matter. If she had to decide between Harrach and Cuvelier, Friedrich believed, she would choose him, "not because of my nice eyes, but because of the difficulty she would have in finding another grand maître"<sup>(133)</sup>. In April, she finally handed over the imperial order, stating that Cuvelier was to be appointed *Surintendant et directeur-général de Tournai et de Tournaisis*, thus having the duties of an intendant<sup>(134)</sup>. At the time, Harrach could triumphantly announce to his father: "Finally my Goliath has been defeated, Cuvelier has left the Council of Finance last Saturday, leaving the whole Clique de la Cour consternated, and the archduchess, because of her partiality for this man that no one understands, seemed sad"<sup>(135)</sup>.

In the end, Cuvelier was thus the only intendant ever to be appointed before the rash reforms of Joseph II. It seems one of those cruel twists of fate. Königsegg-Erps suggests that the emperor was the one who came up with this solution<sup>(136)</sup>. Maria Elisabeth called this outcome an affront and lobbied for a reasonably high salary for the surintendant. She suspected Harrach and his father and other Viennese ministers of having proposed the creation of this function<sup>(137)</sup>. However, I have not found any indication of this. In May 1736, Cuvelier pledged the oath for his new function, which sealed his removal from Brussels<sup>(138)</sup>. It was not only Cuvelier's dismissal that took time, installing his replacement also took several months. As early as January, the emperor had proposed to his sister the appointment of Herzelles as Cuvelier's successor, but Herzelles only started working in the council in August<sup>(139)</sup>. Maria Elisabeth had reservations about him: in her opinion Herzelles suffered many ailments, had hardly any experience in state

(133) HHStA, Berichte, 37: Harrach to Rialp, 3, 9, 17 and 30 January, 3, 7, 10 and 21 February and 9 March 1736, and Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 13 January 1736; AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 20 December 1735 (quotation), and 13 and 17 January 1736; HHStA, GK, 89a: Harrach to Eugene of Savoy, 13 January 1736: "(...) pas tant, pour l'amour de mes beaux yeux, qu'accuse de la peine qu'elle auroit à choisir un autre grand maitre". Rialp tried to put Harrach's mind at rest and reassured him that the emperor had sent his acceptance of the resignation to Brussels: AVA, FH, 578: Rialp to Harrach, 14 January 1736.

(134) HHStA, Berichte, 37: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 13 April 1736 and Harrach to Rialp, 17 April 1736.

(135) AVA, FH, 74: Harrach to Aloys Harrach, 17 April 1736: "Voilà à la fin mon Goliath abbattu, Cuviglier ayant pris samedis passé congé du Conseil des Finances, toute la clyque de la Cour en est consterné, et l'Archiduchesse même par une prévention pour cet homme que personne ne conçoit, en paroît affligée".

(136) AVA, FH, 545: Königsegg-Erps to Harrach, 21 January 1736.

(137) HHStA, Berichte, 24: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 8 February 1736. For a lamentation on Harrach by Maria Elisabeth: HHStA, Berichte, 24: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 10 February 1736.

(138) ARA, DN, 77, f. 114: Cuvelier to Rialp, 29 May 1736.

(139) AVA, FH, 578: Rialp to Harrach, 21 January 1736. For an accurate biography of Herzelles: Denis TOMBOY, "Le marquis Ambroise-Joseph de Herzelles (1680-1759), surintendant et directeur général des finances", in Roland MORTIER & Hervé HASQUIN, eds., *La haute administration dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens*, Brussels, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1999, p. 1-109. Surprisingly enough, when Herzelles was younger he had been sympathetic to the introduction of intendants (cf. p. 53-54 in Tomboy).



finances, and was rather quick-tempered. Yet she accepted his appointment, which apparently she still had the power to refuse<sup>(140)</sup>.

Cuvelier was not the only one to lose his office. A total of 13 officials, excluding Cuvelier, were 'reformed' or obliged to retire, among them Strozzi, Francken, Marechal and others who started begging for the retention of their old salaries or for jobs to replace the functions they had to leave<sup>(141)</sup>. Others, such as Fonseca's son, who had been appointed as *surnuméraire* or a supernumerary staff member in the Council of Finance – these supernumerary officials were not full members of the institution, usually had no salary, but were active in the council's commissions and got a full position when a vacancy occurred – had received an imperial guarantee that he would not be included in the reform<sup>(142)</sup>. On the other hand, the principle of appointing so-called *écoutants* in the *Chambre des Comptes*, young officials to be trained and given experience in the princely administration, was accepted<sup>(143)</sup>. The unified *Chambre des Comptes* would then serve as a training ground for future bureaucrats<sup>(144)</sup>.

The office of *audiencier* remained a tricky problem. Its abolition had already been announced in 1728. Despite this decision, in 1734 Maria Elisabeth suggested that its suspension be cancelled<sup>(145)</sup>. There were rumours that the emperor himself still had doubts about whether or not to confirm the abolition, and with Fonseca, there was even a candidate for the job<sup>(146)</sup>. After Cuvelier's resignation, Harrach expected Maria Elisabeth to propose Ludovisi as the new *audiencier*, although he deemed this man incapable of writing a decent structured letter in Dutch, let alone in French. Several applicants

(140) HHStA, Berichte, 24: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 10 February 1736; AVA, FH, 524: Aloys Harrach to Harrach, 19 May 1736.

(141) ARA, DN, 615: consults HCN, 5 and 28 March and 5 September 1736; ARA, DN, 323, f. 64v-65: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 11 April 1736; ARA, DN, 91, f. 212-212v. and f. 213: Stozzi to Rialp, 16 and 27 December 1735.

(142) ARA, DN, 615: Charles VI to HCN, 1 December 1734; HHStA, Depeschen, 13b: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 8 December 1734. Others who had received the same favour were 'reformed' anyway: HHStA, Depeschen, 13b: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 16 February 1735. On the phenomenon of these supernumerary officials, who had often paid large sums of money for their positions: Reginald DE SCHRYVER, "Inflatie van ambtenaren in de Spaanse Nederlanden. De Raad van Financiën aan het eind van de zeventiende eeuw", in *Bijdragen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 17, 1962, p. 214-220. Maria Elisabeth exhorted the emperor not to grant any more supernumerary positions, as these were harmful to the administrations because too many incompetent men were being appointed this way: ARA, DN, 615: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 18 September 1736.

(143) Instead of the proposed twelve *écoutants*, the emperor appointed only six. Five of these were proposed by Harrach: HHStA, Depeschen, 15a: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 13 February 1737; AVA, FH, 578: Rialp to Harrach, 13 January (with a list of twelve candidates attached, each with a frank judgment by Harrach) and 1 February 1736. In October 1737, a seventh *écoutant* was appointed: ARA, DN, 324, p. 160: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 2 October 1737.

(144) ARA, DN, 615: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 10 June 1735. Imperial decision: HHStA, Depeschen, 13b: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 16 October 1735.

(145) HHStA, Berichte, 23: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 1 June 1734; C. HENIN, *La charge d'audiencier*, *op. cit.*, p. 177-180.

(146) ARA, DN, 77, f. 40-40v.: Cuvelier to Rialp, 28 March 1735; ARA, DN, 85, f. 245-246v.: Fonseca to Rialp, 4 November 1735.

presented themselves, but Harrach told them that the office was closed, even though Maria Elisabeth contended the opposite<sup>(147)</sup>. Finally, Charles VI explicitly repeated his previous orders for annulment<sup>(148)</sup>. However, just as with Cuvelier's resignation, the archduchess decided to keep this decision secret for a certain period of time<sup>(149)</sup>. Perhaps the imperial dispatch had never even been decreed in the Southern Netherlands; at least this is the argument Fonseca used when he repeatedly asked Harrach to revive the office in his favour<sup>(150)</sup>. Charles Henri Cosqui, after Cuvelier the highest ranking official in the bureau of the *audencier*, continued to perform most of the duties of this secretariat until the bureau was definitively shut down in 1744<sup>(151)</sup>.

Once the reforms were implemented, a huge task awaited the new team. The arrears in the financial administration were so colossal that 1,223 accounts still had to be controlled and closed by the new *Chambre des Comptes*. Because of the work overload, the fear was that it would be extremely difficult to catch up<sup>(152)</sup>. Moreover, several letters testify to the remaining problems in the *Chambre des Comptes*, in which five of the twelve officials were frequently ill or absent<sup>(153)</sup>. On top of all this, Harrach considered Jean-Baptiste Joseph de Fraula (1681-1741) an inadequate head of the *Chambre* – but he said he simply could not find a better replacement – and in the Council of Finance he was unhappy with t'Serclaes and Papeians<sup>(154)</sup>. Surprisingly enough, Harrach's complaints seem very similar to those he aired before the switch in personnel, and even in 1740 he still had to propose a number of competent persons to Maria Elisabeth in order to staff the *Chambre des Comptes*, which was not capable of performing its tasks due to lack of talented personnel<sup>(155)</sup>. Because of the difficulties of finding appropriate employees, Aubertin and

(147) HHStA, Berichte, 37: Harrach to Rialp, 27 April 1736.

(148) HHStA, Depeschen 14: Charles VI to Maria Elisabeth, 29 August 1736.

(149) HHStA, Berichte, 37: Harrach to Rialp, 14 September 1736.

(150) AVA, FH, 505: Fonseca to Harrach, 26 and 29 March, 5 and 26 April and 24 May 1737.

(151) HHStA, Depeschen, 22 and 24: Maria Theresia to Königsegg-Erps, 30 March, 13 July and 6 November 1743. Most elaborate on the abolition: C. HENIN, *La charge d'audencier*, op. cit., p. 163-190. Catherine Henin emphasizes three decades of opposition from the Brabant Estates, that, on the basis of the *Joyeuse Entrée*, claimed that the *audencier* should always be a born Brabanter. Cuvelier, however, was born in Hainaut. As the main reasons for the suppression of the office of the *audencier*, Henin mentions its high cost and the fact that this originally executive functionary had amassed too much influence in decision-making in the course of the Early Modern era. Although she notes the lobbying of some ministers against the preservation of the office, however, she does not mention the enmity between Cuvelier and Harrach, that added to the imperial decision to persist in its suppression in 1736.

(152) AVA, FH, 578: Rialp to Harrach, 29 August 1736.

(153) AVA, FH, 514: Fraula to Harrach, 7 August 1737; AVA, FH, 536: Herzelles to Harrach, 16 August 1737; HHStA, Berichte, 38: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 8 and 25 October 1737.

(154) HHStA, Berichte, 38: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 13 April, 29 October and 4 and 11 October 1737.

(155) ARA, Secretarie van State en Oorlog, 1471/2: Harrach to Maria Elisabeth, 6 April 1740.

van de Velde even re-entered the *Chambre des Comptes* in 1738, and would continue working there for many years to come<sup>(156)</sup>.

## Conclusions

All this indicates that the reforms and personnel changes, obtained with immense difficulty, did not produce all the desired effects. And yet, they do constitute a remarkable episode in the evolution of the Brussels central administration. First of all, with the exception of Cuvelier's position in Tournai, 1735 marked the end of the storyline of the *intendants* in these provinces, although some officials still harboured the dream of introducing these agents<sup>(157)</sup>. In 1787, Emperor Joseph II tried to do this as part of his overall reforms, but the subsequent revolution confirms Harrach's fears of generalized unrest<sup>(158)</sup>. The reforms within the Council of Finance and the unification of the *Chambres des Comptes*, however incomplete, proved durable. In the following years several commissioners were sent out to control local finances, as Bervoet did in Ghent. Their activities were eventually centralized in the years after the War of the Austrian Succession, with the establishment of the *Jointe de l'Audition des Comptes* in 1749, and the *Jointe des Administrations et des Affaires des Subsidies* in 1764.

As for appointments, Harrach's instigation of more attention on talented personnel seems to have had a lasting impact. Although he did not manage to remove all the favourites, the principle of nominating capable officials in the central government was more or less generalized<sup>(159)</sup>. It is said that the reign of Maria Theresa was typified by a range of brilliant office-holders in Brussels, such as Patrice François de Neny in the Privy Council and Denis-Benoît de Cazier in the Council of Finance. In the second half of the century, the central Southern Netherlands' bureaucracy truly became a meritocratic apparatus. Furthermore, financial skills gradually became regarded as important as, or perhaps even more important than, juridical knowledge<sup>(160)</sup>. This policy

(156) C. BRUNEEL collab. J.-P. HOYOIS, *Les grands commis*, op. cit., p. 63 and 615; HHSTA, Berichte, 38: Harrach to (presumably) Rialp, 13 June 1738. Maria Elisabeth assisted on their rehabilitation: ARA, DN, 615: Maria Elisabeth to Charles VI, 22 August 1736; HHSTA, Berichte, 37: Harrach to Rialp, 18 December 1736.

(157) Cf. ARA, DN, 92, f. 77-78v.: Strozzi to Rialp, 11 June 1736.

(158) H. HASQUIN, "Les intendants", art. cit., p. 198-199; Luc DHONDT, *Verlichte monarchie, Ancien Régime en revolutie. Een institutionele en historische procesanalyse van politiek, instellingen en ideologie in de Habsburgse, de Nederlandse en de Vlaamse politieke ruimte (1700/1755-1790)*, Brussels, Algemeen Rijksarchief, 2002, vol. 4, p. 101-132.

(159) Flore Alix states that experience was an important factor for appointments already in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. However, I think that having served in the administration did not necessarily equal having the necessary skills, as the aforementioned complaints from Daun, Charles VI and Harrach indicate: Flore ALIX, "Les critères de sélection des hauts fonctionnaires dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux (1700-1725)", in *RBPH*, vol. 87, 2009, 2, p. 314-318.

(160) Michèle GALAND, "Gages, honneurs, mérites: les hauts fonctionnaires dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens", in *RBPH*, vol. 79, 2001, 2, p. 563-566 and 571-576; Piet LENDERS, "Wenen en Brussel: bevoogding die een eigenheid aanvaardt", in Hervé HASQUIN, ed., *Oostenrijks België, 1713-1794. De Zuidelijke Nederlanden onder de Oostenrijkse Habsburgers*, Brussels, Gemeentekrediet, 1987, p. 55-57.

started with Harrach's exhortations. Even Herzelles, who has been depicted as a poor choice in 1736, more or less fulfilled the high expectations in the first years of his term of office, as Denis Tomboy recently demonstrated<sup>(161)</sup>. What is more, the emperor decided to regulate the collation of offices to the detriment of Maria Elisabeth. He ordered the governor-general not to appoint officials in the future without first consulting him. An exception was allowed for the staff of the provincial councils, the Council of Finance and the *Chambre des Comptes*. Charles VI clearly wanted to prevent his sister from further manning trivial but highly paid functions<sup>(162)</sup>.

Did the reforms and the shift in personnel have direct results on the management of the public finances and the financial situation of the Southern Netherlands, as was their intention? This is difficult to verify as clear figures are lacking. The War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) abruptly interrupted some of the developments initiated under Harrach. Only afterwards did the Southern Netherlands' economy visibly start to flourish. Factors benefiting the economic upturn included a well thought-of mercantilist customs policy, good financial management and a determined debt amortization policy, all of which had their foundations in Harrach's ministry. In 1736, for example, as a complement to the institutional reforms the government started a large-scale conversion of foreign debts into more favourable domestic debts, aimed at enhancing its credit worthiness<sup>(163)</sup>. Nonetheless, the net income of the government rose only slightly in the lustrum 1735-1739, when compared with the years before<sup>(164)</sup>. It would be interesting to know if the central administration was more expensive after the reforms than before, but to calculate this would be a very difficult task, taking into account the many favours that were granted to 'reformed' officials in the years afterwards.

The government reforms analysed are a good illustration of the functioning of the Habsburg composite monarchy. First of all, this case helps to define the relationship between the representative of the emperor in Brussels and her grand maître or prime minister *avant la lettre*. Lenders concluded that it was the first time the emperor followed the advice of the minister at the expense of the governor-general, a forerunner of what would become standard in the second half of the century, with the governorship gradually developing into a mere ceremonial function<sup>(165)</sup>. However true Lenders' conclusion, the

(161) D. TOMBOY, "Le marquis Ambroise-Joseph de Herzelles", *art. cit.*, p. 73-82.

(162) AVA, FH, 577: Rialp to Harrach, 16 November 1735.

(163) Helma DE SMEDT, "Living Apart Together. Socio-Economic Changes in the Southern Netherlands within the Habsburg Monarchy in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century", in Harald HEPPNER, Peter URBANITSCH & Renate ZEDINGER, eds., *Social Change in the Habsburg Monarchy. Les transformations de la société dans la monarchie des Habsbourgs. L'époque des Lumières*, Bochum, Dr. Dieter Winkler Verlag, 2011, p. 37-59; John EVERAERT, "Handel in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1650-1795", in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, Haarlem, Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1980, vol. 8, p. 185-202; Herman COPPENS, *De financiën van de centrale regering van de Zuidelijke Nederlanden aan het einde van het Spaanse en onder Oostenrijks bewind (ca. 1680-1788)*, Brussels, Paleis der Academiën, 1992, p. 29-30 and 106-107.

(164) H. COPPENS, *De financiën*, *op. cit.*, p. 342-347.

(165) P. LENDERS, "Ontwikkeling van politiek en instellingen", *op. cit.*, p. 43.

analysis of the correspondence of many officials shows that this step was taken very cautiously. Only in the autumn of 1735 did Charles VI dare to take more resolute steps against his sister.

Secondly this article helps to place the actions of the antagonists – Harrach, Maria Elisabeth and Charles VI – in a web of patronage and kinship relations. The incredibly rich correspondence enables one to delineate coalitions along family lines, within and between formal institutions and between kindred spirits. Different political poles intertwined, from the court in Vienna and the subcourt in Brussels to advisory councils. The example of Harrach's reforms shows how informal decision-making, lobbying and the patient build-up of partnerships still mattered. He pursued professionalization and modernization of the state apparatus, but was forced to do this along classical lines. Harrach could remove Cuvelier and break the influence of the Clique de la Cour thanks to the combination of the urgent need for money, his convincing plea for more capable staff and against radical solutions, his determined character, and the success of his relatives, clients and powerbrokers in all the institutions that mattered. Of course, we cannot attribute all the results to Harrach and his supporters. He came up with his *Expediens* in years that were full of reform projects. The central institutions had been completely reshuffled in 1702, 1706, 1718 and 1725. Friedrich August managed to abort a new institutional revolution, and directed the will to thoroughly adapt to refining the existing institutional armamentarium. The central government apparatus from 1725 remained the basis, but from now on it was staffed with more competent personnel and complemented with specialized bureaus. Moreover, this process had started before Harrach arrived in Brussels, as the decision to cancel the audiencier and the new instruction for the Council of Finance demonstrate. Luc Dhondt stated that these reforms fitted in with the compromise model that was established in 1725 between the government and the estates<sup>(166)</sup>. It confirms my opinion that Harrach's achievements, however important, should be seen as an important step in the consolidation of the Brussels' government, but not as a watershed in Austrian rule in the Southern Netherlands.

## SUMMARY

**Klaas VAN GELDER, *Financial Depletion, Faction Struggle and Competing Networks: The Background to Count Harrach's Reforms of the Southern Netherlands' Central Government (1733-1735)***

In 1735 Emperor Charles VI promulgated an important reform of the central government of the Southern Netherlands, together with a far-reaching switch of personnel in the Brussels financial administration. These measures were pursued by Friedrich August von Harrach, chief minister in Brussels beside the governor-general, who since his arrival in the Southern Netherlands in 1733 had urged for reforms and a radically new attitude with respect to appointing officials. Individual talents and

(166) L. DHONDT, *Verlichte monarchie, op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 72-81.

experience were of prime importance in his opinion. In this article I examine the motives and ideas forming the background of Harrach's reform projects, as well as the way he succeeded in implementing them. Among other things, I pay heed to the Brussels' factional struggles and the role of informal networks to influence decision-making. The result is a refining of the image of modernization surrounding these reforms, and a reinterpretation of the decision-making processes with respect to the Southern Netherlands.

Austrian Netherlands – Harrach – informal decision making – faction struggle – institutional modernization

## SAMENVATTING

**Klaas VAN GELDER, *Financiële crisis, factiestrijd en rivaliserende netwerken: de achtergronden van graaf Harrachs hervormingen in het Zuid-Nederlandse centrale bestuursapparaat (1733-1735)***

In 1735 kondigde keizer Karel VI een belangrijke hervorming af van het centrale Zuid-Nederlandse bestuursapparaat, gepaard met een ongeziene personeelsswissel in de Brusselse financiële administratie. Deze maatregelen kwamen er op aangeven van Friedrich August von Harrach, naast de landvoogdes de leidende minister in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, die sinds zijn aankomst in Brussel in 1733 aangedrongen had op de hervormingen en op een radicaal andere personeelswerving. Talenten en ervaring moesten daarbij doorslaggevend zijn. In dit artikel wordt onderzocht welke motieven en ideeën aan de basis lagen van zijn hervormingsvoorstellen en op welke wijze hij deze kon doordrukken. Daarbij wordt onder meer aandacht geschonken aan de in Brussels heersende factiestrijd en de rol van informele netwerken om de besluitvorming te beïnvloeden. Het resultaat is een nuancering van het beeld van modernisering dat rond deze hervormingen hangt, en een herinterpretatie van de besluitvormingsprocessen met betrekking tot de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden.

Oostenrijkse Nederlanden – Harrach – informele besluitvorming – factiestrijd – institutionele modernisering

## RÉSUMÉ

**Klaas VAN GELDER, *Crise financière, lutte de factions et réseaux en rivalité: le contexte des réformes du comte de Harrach dans le gouvernement central des Pays-Bas méridionaux (1733-1735)***

En 1735, l'empereur Charles VI décrète une importante réforme des institutions centrales au sein des Pays-Bas méridionaux, accompagnée d'un vaste changement de personnel dans l'administration financière à Bruxelles. Ces mesures furent poursuivies par Friedrich August von Harrach, ministre le plus important au côté de la gouvernante générale au sein des Pays-Bas méridionaux. Depuis son arrivée à Bruxelles en 1733, il avait insisté pour mettre en place des réformes ainsi qu'une nouvelle façon de sélectionner les fonctionnaires. D'après Harrach, les talents et l'expérience devaient être primordial. Dans cet article, les motifs et les idées qui ont incité ce ministre à poursuivre les réformes, et la façon dont il les fit accepter à Vienne,



sont examinés. Nous analysons entre autres la lutte de factions ainsi que le rôle des réseaux informels dans le processus décisionnel. Le résultat permet de nuancer l'image de modernisation qui entoure ces réformes, mais aussi de réinterpréter ce processus de décision en rapport avec la situation des Pays-Bas autrichiens.

Pays-Bas autrichiens – Harrach – processus décisionnels informels – lutte de factions  
– modernisation institutionnelle