

Groupe Mémoire - Groep Herinnering

English Summary

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Purpose of the association

The association Groupe Mémoire - Groep Herinnering (GM-GH) has as its main goal to keep alive the legacy and memory of the Belgian resistance during [World War II](#). The objectives include upholding the defence of human rights, respect for human dignity regardless of race, language, ideology, religion and political preference including the struggle against [totalitarianism](#) in all its iterations. The association strives to achieve these aims through lectures, publications, events, press conferences and educational days. The GM-GH distinguishes itself from other associations by keeping a watchful eye on emerging threats to democracy and by shining a light on contemporary populist, neo-fascist, ethno-regionalist and anti-semitic tendencies in Belgian society.

Historical background

The GM-GH was founded in 1993 by the Belgian resistance fighters and [political prisoners](#) of the Second World War^[1], Baron [Arthur Haulot](#),^[2] then-chairman of *Vriendenkring Dachau* together with his friend Baron [Paul Halter](#), then-chairman of the Auschwitz Foundation. The founding of the association coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi [Extermination camps](#) in 1945. Their successors were (in chronological order): [André Wynen](#) (former president of the World Medical Association [WMA](#))^[3] Pieter-Paul Baeten^{[4][5][6]} and Dr Yves Louis (current president of the association).^[7]

Baron Arthur Haulot,^[8] together with Paul Halter,^[9] both former deportees (respectively from Dachau and Auschwitz) and resistance fighters such as André Wynen^[10] kept the memory of

the struggle against [Nazism](#) and [totalitarianism](#) alive. ^[1] They mobilized public opinion against Holocaust denial and the granting of amnesty for collaborators. With the death of Philippe Claes and Pieter-Paul Baeten came an end to the era of political prisoners at the helm of the association.^[11] The recent return of a strand of populism as well as the ongoing controversy concerning the granting of German pensions to Belgian Nazi collaborators convinced the "children of the second generation" of the need to continue the association's struggle. The Belgian collaboration with the Nazis was also rife in the medical profession. The presidency has been entrusted to Dr. Yves Louis, a pediatrician and medical trade unionist who has written studies on Belgian medical collaboration during the Second World War. He has at his side the historian Claire Pahaut who is a longstanding member of the Group and the co-author of a book on [Fort Breendonk](#).^{[12] [13]}

The association's activities

From its inception, the GM-GH has made its mark in Belgian society through educational and political activities^{[14][15]} promoting human rights, preservation of the history of the Second World War and advocating in favour of the unity of the country.

Educational activities

In 1995, the GM-GH partnered with the King Baudouin Foundation to set up "50 years later", a memory project designed to raise awareness of democratic values in Belgian schools, both in the Dutch and French speaking regions of the country. The project was run by the then-president Arthur Haulot. It consisted of a 5 day educational trip by train from Brussels to Auschwitz organized for European youngsters so that they may witness first hand the atrocities which took place in that extermination camp.

The "Train de la démocratie et de la liberté - [Buchenwald](#) - [Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp](#) (Allemagne)" (the Train of Freedom, on its way to Buchenwald - Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp (Germany)) was an educational sponsored journey which took place in 2008 for 1000 youngsters (400 Belgians and other Europeans) to meet at and learn about the Buchenwald Nazi camp and what transpired there. From the Belgian side, the trip was organized by the National Institute of War Invalids (l'Institut National des Invalides de Guerre, Anciens Combattants et Victimes de Guerre) and the International Federation of Resistance Fighters. Pieter-Paul Baeten accompanied the youngsters on this trip as president of the Buchenwald association and president of the GM-GH.^{[16][17][18]}

Political engagement

In 2007, Doctor [André Wynen](#), the second president of the GM-GH, filed a motion before the Senate endorsed by Senator Francis Delpérée stating that in order to be able to stand for democratic elections, all political parties and their candidates must openly declare that their programmes are in conformity with the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) adopted on 10 December 1948 by the United Nations and that, should this be challenged, they are prepared to answer before the Belgian judicial system (Breendonk Declaration 2007).

In 2010, Pieter-Paul Baeten, third president of the GM-GH organized a Press conference in the City of Brussels: "the veterans say NO to amnesty. Today, there are voices calling for an

end to the duty of remembrance with respect to freedom fighters. Their actions support oblivion in favor of collaborators.” (Article by Marc Metdepenningen in Le Soir, 19 July 2010).

In 2014, the [N-VA](#) party joined the Belgian government. In 2014 the Belgian interior minister [Jan Jambon](#), member of the [N-VA](#) party, stated that in his view it was a mistake for the Belgians to collaborate with the German army occupier during the Second World War although these citizens had their reasons for so doing. The GM-GH rebuked minister [Jan Jambon](#)'s remarks concerning German collaboration in the Second World War in a publication in [La Libre Belgique](#) on 14 October 2014 providing arguments that Mr Jambon ought not turn his back on history (Claire Pahaut and Yves Louis).^[19] The GM-GH took strong offence to such reasoning and stated unequivocally that collaboration was treasonous and should not be accepted nor condoned. The GM-GH takes the view that a substantial number of Belgian collaborators were "ideological" collaborators ([Stanley Hoffmann](#) definition of collaboration)^[20] with a desire to cooperate with the Germans so as to bring about a positive domestic transformation.

Parliamentary inquiries

The classification of the cellars of the [Gestapo](#) - [Avenue Louise](#), Brussels

During World War II, after the German invasion of Belgium, the German military occupied Brussels. The [Gestapo](#), which was part of the Nazi security organisation, the [Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst](#) (Sipo-SD), set up their Brussels headquarters on [Avenue Louise](#). On 9 January 2014 the Brussels government launched a procedure to classify the cellars of the buildings occupied by the [Gestapo](#), during the Second World War, at 347 and 453 Avenue Louise in Brussels. The interested parties requesting to preserve this heritage site included Auschwitz Foundation President Henri Goldberg, Daniel Weysow from the same Foundation and for the GM-GH, Roger De Tavernier and historian Claire Pahaut. The provisional classification forced the owners to open their cellar to extensive expert investigation by the "Commission royale des Monuments, Sites et Fouilles". Following the favorable report by the "Commission royale des Monuments, Sites et Fouilles" the cellars in the two buildings were officially classified on 14 January 2016.^{[21] [22]}

Controversial ongoing allocation of pensions to Belgian military collaborators of the [Waffen-SS](#) during the Second World War

Research disclosed that a number of Belgians who joined the [Waffen-SS](#) during the Second World War received and continue to receive a pension from Germany. At the end of the Second World War, 57,000 Belgian collaborators were convicted, 30,000 were Flemish and the other 27,000 were Walloons and from the Brussels region^[23]. The GM-GH estimates that as many as 2,500 ex-collaborators received German pensions. The GM-GH president, Pieter-Paul Baeten expressed his sadness and disbelief that in the current European era, the nature of the pension and information relating to the pension recipients could not be exchanged between the German government and the Belgian authorities. He suspected a lack of will or outright concealment. He also expressed the view that Hitler granted Belgian SS members German nationality in 1941.^[24] The German government for its part stated in 2012 that it could not confirm the alleged 2,500 figure for Belgian ex-collaborators receiving German pensions. They did, however, confirm that 57 Belgians were receiving German BVG

("Bundesversorgungsgesetz") maintenance payments, with no explanation who those Belgians were.^[25] Pieter-Paul Baeten, arrested at 17 years of age by the [Gestapo](#) with the help of Flemish collaborators, stated "For us if there were one person receiving this annuity, it would be one too many." The number of collaborators and the circumstances of their receiving this pension remains questionable. Subsequent to work conducted by the GM-GH and Alvin de Coninck (son of a resistance fighter), deputies from various political parties tabled a motion for a resolution seeking clarification of this issue.^[26] As of 2017, 27 people residing in Belgium were receiving this annuity from Germany.^[27] A working group will meet under the direction of a representative of the authors of the resolution to submit a proposal to the German authorities.^[28] ^[29] ^[30] [\[2\]](#) The Belgian parliament's Foreign relations Committee passed a Resolution on 19 February 2019 calling on its government to ask Germany to stop providing this tax-free annuity, whilst emphasizing the injustice of these payments as victims of "[Nazism](#)" do not receive comparable allowances.^[31]

Historical projects

Discovery of the Wolvertem [NSDAP](#) Mütterheim

Whilst conducting research on the role of Belgian doctors in the Second World War, Dr. Yves Louis discovered Nazi documents in the war archives in Paris referring to a Mütterheim (maternity hospital) in Wolvertem, Belgium. This German establishment in rural Wolvertem in Flemish Brabant situated north-west of Brussels was hitherto kept a secret. This Mütterheim was set up by the Germans as a branch of the Brussels Brugmann hospital, which the Germans used as a war hospital (Kriegslazarett). Formerly known as castle Levedale in Wolvertem, referred to also as Neromhof, was converted into a maternity hospital in August 1942. The first admissions were in November of the same year. The Mütterheim offered a very high level of medical care for both mother and child and in this manner endeavored to diminish the incidence of miscarriages and premature births. Spouses of SS officers benefited from the level of care, peace and comfort offered by this maternity hospital. The Mütterheim in Wolvertem was by strict definition not a [Lebensborn](#) clinic and therefore did not come under the jurisdiction of the [SS](#). In practice, women who had been in relationships with an SS or a German soldier could have their 'Aryan' baby delivered on the premises. A genuine Lebensborn maternity was later established at Wégimont castle near Liège, the Wolvertem clinic just serving as a stepping stone. Nanna Conti, the mother of the SS minister of public health (Reichsgesundheitsführer) [Leonardo Conti](#),^[32] oversaw the Mütterheim in Wolvertem. She appointed a Norwegian Lebensborn as head midwife. Dr. Frans Daels, a collaborating gynecologist from [Ghent University](#), and his assistant Adèle Vankerckhove, director of the nursing school in Ghent, saw to the appointment of Flemish midwives to the Mütterheim. The clinic was operational for a year before moving its activities to Wégimont castle, a genuine Lebensborn clinic. An estimated 20 to 30 children were born in Wolvertem.^[33]

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