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CEGESOMA - State Archives

NEWSLETTER

No 76 - June 2022



NEWS

ACCESS TO OUR COLLECTIONS

Our new library catalogue with updated search modalities is now online.

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THREE QUESTIONS FOR ...

Gertjan Desmet, archivist of CegeSoma, explains his profession and what it entails.

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LIBERATION ROUTE EUROPE

A website that connects places and life stories related to World War II for different European countries.

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RESEARCH



EHRI

Approximately 50 partner institutions came together to take stock and reflect on the future prospects of this large-scale project on the Holocaust.

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PUBLICATIONS

SECRET ARMY FOUNDATION & THE FOUNDATION GÉRARD WILLEMOT PRIZES

Important recognition for two books on which historians from the State Archives/CegeSoma collaborated.

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New catalogue for the CegeSoma library



In the course of the integration of CegeSoma's collections into those of the State Archives, we would like to inform you about some changes concerning online access to our collections.

With a view to centralising information and making it more accessible/compatible, the modern tools used by the State Archives shall be at your disposal, thereby replacing CegeSoma's PALLAS database, which has become obsolete (except for the access module to the photo library).

Access to the collections

- **A new catalogue for the CegeSoma library**, which offers new advanced research features, can now be accessed via [this link](#).
- **The descriptions of CegeSoma's archival holdings** can be accessed via [this link](#).
- **The photo library** remains accessible via [Pallas](#).

Access to the collections

Via [this link](#), you will find all information about how to find and access CegeSoma's collections (archives, library and photo library).

We are also pleased to welcome you to our reading room during your next visit.

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THREE QUESTIONS FOR ... Gertjan Desmet,

archivist at CegeSoma



Gertjan, holding Masters degrees in History (*UGent*) and Archival Science (*VUB*), you started working on research projects conducted by the State Archives of Belgium in 2011 (co-authoring an archival guide on the history of the Jewish populations and transferring the archives of the military courts). You then joined CegeSoma in 2018.

Could you tell us about your day-to-day work as an archivist?

My day is organized around tasks related to serving the public and tasks related to processing and managing the archives. In the morning, I start by checking my emails to see if I have received any "urgent" questions. These may be requests from people researching a family member, or from researchers with a question about a specific topic or location. I then try to direct them to the research tools available rather than doing the research directly for them so that they can identify the available resources and become more autonomous.

Sometimes I receive requests from people coming from abroad on a research trip and I try to help them to identify the archives that might interest them. Belgium is a complex country, but also quite small and it is not unusual to get to know colleagues from other archival institutions.



Finally, I go to the Joseph Cuvelierrepository (AGR2) one day per week where, among other things, I prepare documents from our holdings that have been reserved for consultation in the reading room.

The rest of my time is dedicated to the archives: I am in charge of managing our repositories, carrying out relevant administrative tasks and

processing of new acquisitions, I check and complete the information on our holdings in our collection management system, ...

Finally, I am fortunate enough to have the time to work on new inventories - an exciting task, which allows me to do a deep dive into a collection, its context and the history of its producer.

According to you, what qualities required of an archivist?

It is difficult to answer. I would say that you must have the same qualities as a historian, which means being patient, rigorous, organized, structured, as well as having an eye for detail and the ability to put things into perspective, a certain obstinacy... as well as two additional qualities.

The first is to be able to not... think like a historian, which means to disregard the historical interest, *stricto sensu*, of the documents in order to concentrate on the context of their production and formal characteristics. This also means avoiding getting lost in too detailed and/or "oriented" descriptions: the goal is to write inventories that are as "research agnostic" as possible, so that they can be used later for any kind of research.

The second quality, particularly necessary in the context of a public service such as the State Archives, is to keep in mind that scholars represent only a small subgroup of our audience, which also includes citizens looking for public documents, civil servants, court clerks, notaries, journalists, genealogists... This must be kept in mind when establishing what should be inventoried or digitized as a priority, but also when welcoming people who know nothing about archives.



What is your vision for CegeSoma in 25 years?

My dream is that all our archives will be described with quality inventories, all of which available online in EAD (an encoding format that respects the principles defined by the international standard for archival description ISAD (G)); that we will have been able to "save" important archives from deterioration and destruction; that users will have new ways of accessing existing data; and, finally, that the institution will have been enriched through the inclusion of colleagues with new profiles coming from different backgrounds and with other types of skills.

P.S. Anything in the archives that stood out for you?



What never ceases to amaze me are the treasures that continue to appear so long after the end of the world wars - photographs of German soldiers, letters from resistance fighters, Generally, what I find interesting is the complementarity of the CegeSoma's collections with those of the other repositories. Where other repositories hold the archives of state administrations and public institutions, as well as those of courts and tribunals, CegeSoma specializes in the archives of private individuals and organizations. Thus, the AGR2 repository will have, for example, the court file of a collaborator and we may have letters or personal

writings of this individual at CegeSoma.

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The Battle of the Bulge: A different perspective



Remembrance tourism in the digital age

Remembrance tourism has developed in many places marked by the history of World War II. The phenomenon is not new, but it is somewhat different in the digital age. "Liberation Route Europe" is one of the new actors in the digital field proposing to connect places and life stories related to the history of WWII. Through short, illustrated contributions, [the Liberation Route Europe website](#) addresses a series of well-known and lesser-known themes of the history of World War II in several European countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Poland and the Czech Republic.

The troubled context of the Liberation

CegeSoma was asked to contribute to the site on two occasions. At first, several contributions focused on what was at stake during the liberation in September 1944. Inclusions of particular note related to this theme are: [the infamous Courcelles massacre](#); [the liberation of Brussels](#); the ceremonies that took place at the monument of [the Unknown Soldier](#); and well-known personalities, such as the Resistance fighter [René Noël](#) and [Major-General George Erskine](#).

Other aspects of the Battle of the Bulge

More recently, twenty-five contributions have been submitted on the von Rundstedt offensive. For a long time, the history of the Battle of the Bulge has focused on a series of strategic locations, the major military issues, and a few major protagonists of the struggle. These aspects are, of course, essential to understand the battle. But, in recent

years, other actors and issues have also been discussed, allowing for a more human and local perspective. This is also an approach we have tried to adopt by revisiting a series of lesser-known episodes of the dark days of the winter 1944–1945. For example, while the battle was raging, [Léon Degrelle, the Volksführer der Wallonen, believed his time had come and set up a puppet government in Limerlé](#). But the offensive also resulted in a series of murderous actions aimed at both civilians and soldiers, [including eleven African-American GIs targeted by soldiers of the 1st SS Panzer Division in Wereth](#) who were never held accountable for their actions, although they were prosecuted for [the massacre of civilians in Stavelot](#). The site also helps us understand why Houffalize has [a statue of Pogge](#), an emblematic character of Schaerbeek folklore, as well as how [some 2000 German POWs](#) found themselves in the area and what the role of [the bomb disposal units](#) was after the battle. In other words, so many aspects - among many others! - that broaden our view of the history of this battle.

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EHRI-PP General Partner Meeting Prague 17 May 2022

“Like Playing Twelve Games of Chess”



One of the highlights for the EHRI Consortium is the General Partner Meeting, an annual or bi-annual gathering of representatives of all partner institutions involved in EHRI. People who mostly work remotely from countries all over the world, but who all share a special interest in Holocaust research, get together for face to face meetings in a single location. This time, over fifty people representing the institutions involved in the EHRI-PP project, including the State Archives-Cegesoma travelled to Prague, where EHRI partner, the [Masaryk Institute and Archives](#) of the Czech Academy of Sciences hosted the event at the venue of the [Univerzita Karlova](#) (Charles University), the Karolinum. The last time the EHRI-PP consortium met in person for a General Partner Meeting was in February 2020 in Munich, before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, so this year's meeting had a special shine to it.

Ukraine



Despite the joyous atmosphere created by meeting again in person, the event was overshadowed by concerns for the people working at the [Center for Urban History of East Central Europe](#) in Lviv, Ukraine, an EHRI-3 partner. After the opening of the General Partner Meeting by the Co-Director of EHRI, Reto Speck, and **Prof. Eva Zažímalová**, President of the Czech Academy of Sciences, the first session was dedicated to EHRI and the war in Ukraine and online contact was made with **Taras Nazaruk**, the Head of Digital History Projects at the center in Lviv. Speaking to us from a big screen, Taras told the audience about the difficult situation for himself and the center and how they still managed to continue their work. The center is also acting as a place where refugees from other parts of the country take shelter before they move on. In the meantime, the first steps in recording testimonies about the war for the archive of the future, have been taken. The center's staff are committed to staying active and continuing their work for as long as possible. Taras himself, however, is aware that he

could be drafted for the Ukrainian army at any moment.

After this moving session, it was not without some difficulty that the meeting continued with the rest of the program.



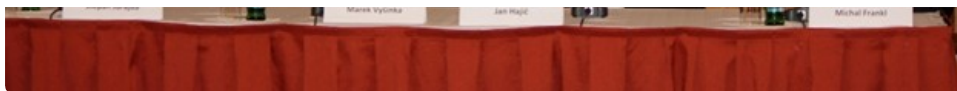
Nevertheless, as this general meeting was dedicated to the Preparatory Phase of EHRI establishing itself as a permanent European Holocaust Research organisation, it was also felt that understanding and commemorating Europe's past and setting up a European network now had more urgency than ever.

The statutes of a future EHRI-ERIC

The goal of EHRI-PP is to transform EHRI from a series of projects into a permanent research infrastructure with its own legal personality. Previously, the legal form of the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) was identified as best suited to meet the needs of EHRI. Among the main tasks of EHRI-PP's Work Package 2 'Governance and legal work' – which is led by the State Archives-CegeSoma – is the writing of the statutes for the future ERIC. During the General Partner Meeting in Prague, Work Package 2 was in the position to present a first complete draft of the statutes. This text will now be further discussed with the relevant stakeholders, in particular the Board of Governmental Representatives, on which Belgium is also represented.

EHRI will be a so-called 'distributed' research infrastructure. In addition to the central seat, being located in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, as this is the intended host country of EHRI-ERIC, National Nodes will be active in the various countries that are members or observers of the ERIC.





A National Node is a national network of Holocaust-related research, archival and museum institutions, with one acting as central coordinator. In the Czech Republic, this node is already well on its way and a panel of those involved – **Prof. Štěpán Jurajda, CERGE-EI and deputy Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, Marek Višinka, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Prof. Jan Hajič, LINDAT/CLARIAH-CZ, Charles University, and Dr. Michal Frankl, EHRI-CZ, Masaryk Institute and Archives** – told those present what you can expect when you set up a node and the challenges and difficulties you may encounter.

Later in the afternoon, a separate meeting was organised to discuss the development of nodes in different countries and the progress that is being made. Michal Frankl, who is the coordinator of this process noted: *“It feels like playing twelve games of chess, that each starts at a different time and is in a different phase”*. However, as it appeared, developments are positive in many countries, and apart from the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, the UK, Slovakia, Israel, Germany and especially Austria have also made excellent progress. In Belgium, Kazerne Dossin and the State Archives-CegeSoma have organised a third workshop on June 16 with potential institutions interested in joining the Belgian National Node.



In addition to structures, there is also a need for specific offers and policies on research, users and, last but not least, technological development. Central questions are: what will be EHRI's target group and its core business? What can it offer to its users that builds on what is already established, such the EHRI Portal, training and fellowships programme? How will EHRI communicate with and reach out to its wider community? The rest of the General Partner Meeting was devoted to presentations and discussions on this work in progress, which will result in a Business and Implementation Plan.

After the first day in Prague, another day was reserved for work package meetings that discussed the progress so far in more detail and sometimes in smaller groups.

Optimism

All in all, the meetings ended with a general feeling of optimism; the launch of a permanent EHRI in

January 2025 is a realistic and already almost tangible event.

Most participants, after two years of living through numerous lockdowns, also enjoyed the social aspect of the meetings and the traditional consortium dinner.

(Extracts of this article were taken from the EHRI website) - photos by Vlasta Mádlová, Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences

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The 2021 Secret Army Foundation and Gérard Willemot Foundation prizes .

Important recognition for published works on which historians of the State Archives/Cegesoma collaborated.



The Secret Army Foundation ('Fondation Armée secrète 1940-1945'), a legacy association for the great armed resistance movement during the occupation, awarded its 2021 prize to two books, one in French and one in Dutch, on 17 June 2022.

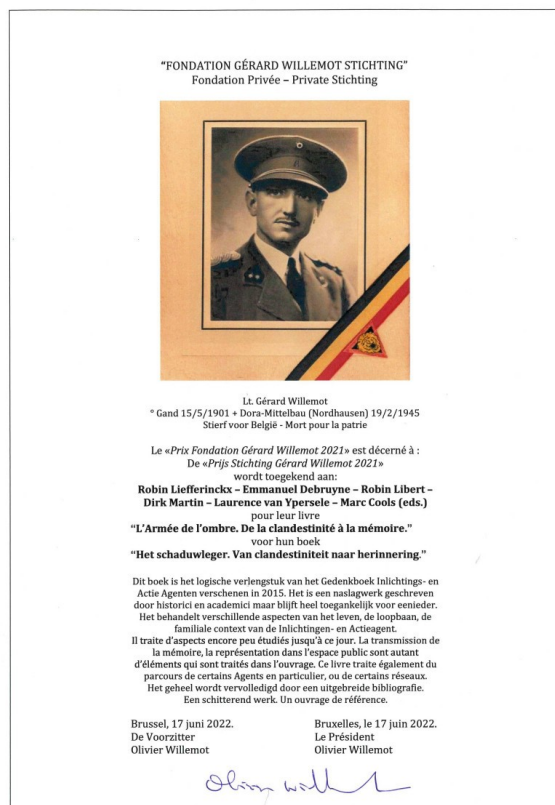


The Dutch publication, [Was opa een held? Speuren naar mannen en vrouwen in het verzet tijdens WOII](#)** was edited by our colleague Fabrice Maerten. The director of Cegesoma, Nico Wouters, and several other members of the scientific staff of the State Archives also contributed to it.

The French publication is a moving book about the resistance fighter Andrée Dumon, *Je ne vous ai pas oubliés. Liberté. 1945.*

The Secret Army Foundation's prize aims to stimulate scientific historiography, particularly by rewarding the author or authors of a publication – written in French or Dutch – that portrays people, facts or events highlighting the role of the Secret Army or the Resistance.

The criteria taken into account by the jury to determine the best study among those submitted are: originality; objectivity; degree of difficulty and complexity of the research; choice of sources; historical veracity; readability and linguistic ease; form; structure and presentation; availability to the public; and conformity with the statutory purpose of the Secret Army Foundation. Eligible works include historical memoirs, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, scientific studies, works published by a publishing house and other manuscripts, provided that they have existed for less than five years and that their content complies with the statutory purpose of the Secret Army Foundation. Works of fiction are excluded. The prize or, as in 2021, the prizes, are awarded once every three years.



2021 prize of the 'Fondation Gérard Willemot'.

** This publication also exists in French under the title : '[Papy était-il un héros? Sur les traces des hommes et des femmes dans la Résistance pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale](#)'.

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While, for a long time, the history of intelligence and field agents remained poorly known, various recent initiatives have led to a better understanding of this important group.

In 2020, thanks to the initiative of Robin Libert, Robin Liefferinckx and Marc Cools, a new milestone was reached with the publication of the book [L'Armée de l'ombre. De la clandestinité à la mémoire.](#)



This collective work addresses several essential themes: the profile of the agents; the impact of the occupying power's repression; the agents' view of death, the perception of children; and the phenomenon of commemoration and memory in the public space. Several historians linked to the CegeSoma contributed chapters to this book which has just been awarded the