8. The Lower Rhine and Limburg from 1789 until 1945

8.1. The French revolution, the Napoleonic Wars and the incorporation of the Lower Rhine and Limburg into the German Federation, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Belgium

On the eve of the French Revolution in 1789 the situation in the Lower Rhine and Limburg was as follows:

The Lower Rhine was mainly under control of Brandenburg-Prussia who acquired the Duchy of Cleves and Mark and the Principality of Moers already in 1609 and the Upper Quarter of Gelderen in 1713. Since 1609 the Duchies of Gulik and Berg were governed by the Duke of Pfalz-Neuburg and later by Pfalz-Sulzbach. Parts of the Southern Lower Rhine belonged continually to the Arch-Bishopric of Cologne with the exception of the Free Empire Cities of Cologne and Aachen. Limburg was divided into several territories: Parts around Maastricht, Vaals, Maasbracht, Heerlen, Venlo and Maasmechelen belonged to the Netherlands republic established in 1648 and where thus outside the Holy Roman Empire. Other parts belonged to the Principality of the Prince-Bishopric of Liege, to the Duchy of Limburg, the Duchy of Gulik, the Habsburgian part of the Duchy of Gelderen and some smaller territories remaining. All of those where part of the Holy Roman Empire and also under Austro-Habsburgian control with the exception of the Prince-Bishopric Liege and the Duchy of Gulik. This was about to change considerably in the years following the French revolution (see also chapter 7.).

In 1787 France entered a budget crisis which caused turmoil and eventually lead to the appointment of a liberal minded finance minister who called on the Estates General to resolve the crisis, which included a representation of the Third Estate (Commoners). While the aristocracy and clergy grudgingly agreed to reforms, rumours appeared that the King would gather troops in Paris to dissolve the assembly which lead to a public uprising (storming of the Bastille) and in August 1789 feudalism was abolished and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen issued. In 1791 a new constitution was established creating a constitutional monarchy. A counterrevolution was attempted in 1791 initiated mainly by emigrant nobles from abroad leading to warfare in early 1792. France declared war on Austria and in July, Prussia joined Austria and together they launched a successful campaign to almost break through to Paris. The King was blamed for conspiracy with the enemy and a violent uprising in September 1792 lead to the arrest of the King and many aristocrats. France was declared a republic on 20th Sept. 1792 and with many new volunteers arriving, the Austrian and Prussian armies were checked and by April 1793 Brabant, Limburg and the Rhineland were occupied as well. Meanwhile the French King Louis XIV was executed on 21st Jan. 1793. When Great Britain and other European powers joint the coalition against France in spring 1793 the French army was driven back and again extreme measures were taken by the Jacobins, now in power. This development culminated in the “reign of Terror” lasting from Sept. 1793 until July 1794 and resulted in the arrest of at least 300,000 suspects and the execution of 17,000. However, victory over Austria in June 1794 changed the course of the revolution and reactionary and royalist forces tried to gain power again who were stopped eventually by general Napoleon Bonaparte in October 1795. In the aftermath of the French victory over Austria, Brabant, Limburg and the Lower Rhine were re-occupied by France, in 1795 the Netherlands and Prussia also negotiated for peace and became French satellites (Encyclopædia Britannica, French Revolution, Inc., 1994-2013, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/219315/French-Revolution/2501/The-Directory-and-revolutionary-expansion)

With the renewed occupation France prepared to retain Brabant, Limburg and the Lower Rhine for good and all of them became an integral part of the French Republic in October 1795. In October 1797 the area was divided into departments (source: Kein Recht auf Autonomy): Most of Limburg became part of the Department Meuse-Inférieure (Lower Maas, in Dutch “Nedermaas”) which consisted of three
arrondissements: Hasselt, Roermond and Maastricht. The Lower Rhine became part of the Department Roer which consisted of four arrondissements: Aachen, Cologne, Krefeld and Cleves. The French constitution of 1795 was introduced, feudalism was denounced, economic freedom and secularism was introduced and monasteries were confiscated and a new juridical system in accordance to the French constitution was introduced. French became the only official language. The Duchy of Berg on the East bank of the Rhine became a satellite of the French Republic and a model state after 1806 where the Napoleonic laws were introduced in 1810 (Landschaftsverband Rheinland: Rheinische Geschichte, Epochen und Ereignisse - Aufbruch in die Moderne – Die Franzosenzeit (1794-1814), http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/epochen/epochen/Seiten/1794bis1815.aspx ). To the North West, the Netherlandic Republic was invaded by French troops in 1795 and the French erected the Batavian Republic modelled on the French Republic. After Napoleon Bonaparte declared himself emperor in 1804, he established the Kingdom of Holland in 1806 with his brother Louis Bonaparte as King. However, in 1810 he forced his brother’s abdication and incorporated the Netherlands along with some Northern parts of Germany into the French Empire which lasted until Napoleon’s defeat in 1814 (Rijksmuseum: Tijdlijn Nederlandse geschiedenis, 1780-1810 Patriottentijd, Bataafse Republiek en Franse Tijd, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/ontdek-de-collectie/tijdlijn-nederlandse-geschiedenis ). While the “French period” was seen by some as an occupation, others saw this as liberation and eagerly adopted and promoted the Republican and liberal ideas which came along with it. In the Rhineland several movements sprang up in the wake of the French revolution before it was annexed by France itself in 1795. The first serious attempt to establish a liberal democracy in the Rhineland was made shortly after the French Republican troops took over the West-bank of the Rhine in October 1792. When the city of Mainz fell to the French on the 21 October 1792 the first so-called Jacobin-clubs were founded with the aim to establish a liberal-democratic state separate from the Holy Roman Empire. Anton Joseph Dorsch and Georg Forster lead the Mainz administration from November 1792 onwards and democratic elections were prepared for 24 February 1793. On 17 March 1793 the newly elected parliament, the “Rheinisch-Deutscher Nationalkonvent”, convened in Mainz for the first time. On 18th March Forster declared the establishment of a separate Republic covering the area between the cities of Bingen and Landau but on 21st March the convent decided to request re-union with the French motherland because the newly erected Republic would not be able to survive without the support of the French Republic. However, on the 14th April 1793 Prussian-Austrian troops surrounded Mainz and in July the French troops surrendered which also meant the end of the Mainz Republic (Landesarchivverwaltung Rheinland-Pfalz: Vor 210 Jahren: Der 18. März 1793. Der Rheinisch-deutsche Nationalkonvent in Mainz. http://www.landeshauptarchiv.de/index.php?id=408 ).

When French troops re-conquered the Rhineland in 1794 the Rhineland area, the Lower Rhine and Limburg came again under French republican administration. However, the insecurity about the consequences of continued warfare an peace negotiations left the status of the French occupied areas on the West-bank of the Rhine unresolved until more definite steps were taken after the arrival of the French General Hoche in the beginning of 1797. General Hoche suggested the creation of a separate Republic which led to the emergence of the Cisrhenanian movement. This movement aimed at creating a separate Rhenish Republic or even a Rhenish-Belgian Confederation modelled on the French Republic while not being part of it but totally independent from the Holy Roman Empire and had Georges Forster and Josef Goerres as leaders. The name “Cisrhenanian” was a reference to the Cisalpine Republic created after Napoleon Bonaparte’s successful invasion of Northern Italy which lead to the creation of this satellite Republic. Already by this date the Cisrhenanians adopted the later Northrhine-Westphalian federal state flag Green-White-Red as the Cisrhenanian flag and in contrast to the later German-liberal-nationalistic movements, the Cisrhenanians did not define a certain territory their “fatherland”, their fatherland was everywhere where the state was based on the freedom and sovereignty of the people (Yvonne Kafka: Das „Wendejahr“ 1797/8: Cisrhenanische Republik oder Annektion?, GRIN Verlag GmbH; 1 edition July 27, 2011, ISBN: 3640968263).
However, there were divisions inside this movement: While the southern and France bordering areas supported close association or even incorporation into the French Republic, to the north they preferred independence for as much as possible. Several cities in the Northern Rhineland such as Bonn, Cologne and Koblenz announced the “Cisrhenanian Republic” in September 1797 but in the meanwhile forces who supported complete annexation of the West-bank Rhineland came to power in Paris. When General Hoche died in Sept. 1797 this meant another severe set-back for the Cisrhenanians because his successor, Governor Rudier, supported complete incorporation of the Rhineland and Belgium into the French Republic. When the Holy Roman Emperor accepted the Rhine as the new frontier in October 1797 during the peace negotiations at Campe Formio the French government opted for complete incorporation of the West-bank Rhineland which then meant effectively the end of the Cisrhenanian movement.

It is difficult to estimate the popularity of “Rheinisch-Deutscher Nationalkonvents” and the later Cisrhenanian movement among the common people. For the election of the national convent held in February 1793 all independent men above 21 years of age were eligible, however, servants were excluded. Before a person could vote he had to swear an oath on the people sovereignty, the unity of the state and on freedom. Eventually 130 municipalities sent deputies to the national convent in Mainz and as far as can be estimated about 20% of the electorate participated (Landesarchivverwaltung Rheinland-Pfalz: Vor 210 Jahren: Der 18. März 1793. Der Rheinisch-deutsche Nationalkonvent in Mainz. http://www.landeshauptarchiv.de/index.php?id=408). This may not appear a lot but for its time it was still significant. Even more difficult appears it to anticipate the popularity of the Cisrhenanian Republic; as was generally the case, the leaders of such movements were usually of bourgeois origins since they had received education to formulate such demands. Moreover, the administrative organization, communication and transport available at that time certainly hampered elections and the spread of news and information. Referring to the 20% participation of the national convent election it appears that the majority of the common people remained indifferent.

In Limburg the situation on the eve of the French revolution was slightly different. When the Austrian Emperor Joseph II attempted to re-organize his part of the Southern Netherlands the old State General feared for their rights and privileges. A rebellion in Brabant in 1788 was the result which established the short lived Republic of the Southern Netherlands but it did have only little impact on Limburg since it remained outside the 9 founding members (Brabant, Hainault, Flanders, West-Flanders, Namur, Mechelen, Habsburgian Gelderland, The city of Tournai and the district of Tournai) with the exception of the Roermond area as part of Habsburgian Gelderland. Those parts of Limburg belonging to the Prince-Bishopric Liege were also unaffected since it was an independent territory of the Holy Roman Empire until a rebellion broke out there, too, in 1789. The rebels in Liege joined the Republic of the Southern Netherlands as an associate state but the new Austrian Emperor Leopold II was able to quickly suppress the revolt by the end of 1790 (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, page 267).

But the restoration of Habsburgian rule in Limburg lasted only until 1793 when the French Republican troops occupied Limburg for the first time and French Republican rule became permanent for 20 years after the French victories in 1795. Just as was the case in the Lower Rhine, this French rule had a strong and lasting impact on Limburg, the feudal society was effectively abolished, the church and aristocracy lost its absolute power monopoly and a new class emerged: The bourgeoisie, increasing its influences continuously throughout the 19th century. Just as in the Lower Rhine, once this group and the liberal ideas accompanying it established itself, the tide could not be turned, even during the restoration after the fall of the French empire in 1815 (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, page 269-271). The beginning of the industrialization became another factor to manifest the influence of the bourgeoisie but industrialization created also a new suppressed class which in the next decades tried to emancipate: The workers.
When in 1814 the by then renamed French Empire under Napoleon Bonaparte was losing its momentum and eventually was defeated by united forces consisting of, among others, Austrian, Prussian, Russian and Swedish forces at the battle of Leipzig, the end of Napoleonic rule was near and during 1814 and 1815 the united forces occupied the Lower Rhine and Limburg. Soon discussions arose how to re-organize post-Napoleonic Europe and all victorious leaders agreed to effectively restore the order of the pre-French period, thus re-establishing the aristocratic rule but all also agreed to set up constitutions and allow for some form of public participation in form of assemblies or parliaments, often only with advisory powers. However, some of the pre-Napoleonic states did not exist any longer and the major powers in Europe such as Austria, Sweden, Great Britain and the emerging Prussia had their own interests. With support of Great Britain the Netherlandic (Dutch) King Willem I claimed not only the rule over the old 7 Netherlandic provinces but also over the previous Habsburgian Southern Netherlands (the later Belgium) and also to shift the border as far South-East as the city of Bonn in the Rhineland, thus including not only Limburg but also the whole Lower Rhine. (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenis van Limburg - De Nedermaas niemandsland 1814-1815, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, page 278).

However, Prussia vetoed this plan and during the Congress of Vienna a border was eventually agreed which split the area into the United Netherlands including all what presently is the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg on the one hand and Prussia, including what is nowadays the German Federal states of North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate and the Saarland on the other. This lead to Limburg being governed from the Dutch Kingdom while the Lower Rhine became an integral part of Prussia as a whole from 1815 onwards.

This restoration of the “old” powers was also accompanied with attempts to restore the old feudal order but here the old powers met increasing resistance from those groups, in particular the bourgeoisie, profiting from the 20 years of French rule. It also became clear that the Rhineland, including the Lower Rhine and the Duchy of Berg would only reluctantly accept Prussian rule and would form a counterpart to the central administration in Berlin. German nationalistic groups used the situation to demand the creation of a Greater German state glorifying everything they called “German” while declaring the French and the liberal-republican ideas they had introduced as “the enemy to be hated” (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenis van Limburg - De Nedermaas niemandsland 1814-1815, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, page 272). This was the beginning of a German nationalist movement which should later have a profound and devastating effect on European history (see chapter 2. Nationalism). While this forces promoted also some liberal demands for popular participation in a future German national state they nevertheless wanted to limit this participation to what they claimed to be ethnic Germans, thus excluding everything they called non-German such as Jews, Slavonic peoples etc. They claimed that their “Germany” was ruled by foreign forces (not only during the French-Napoleonic period) and a chauvinist element appeared calling for a powerful German Empire, something which also appealed to parts of the old aristocracy. Nevertheless, support for liberal-democratic ideas remained strong in the Rhineland as a French legacy, in particular among those who supported and actively tried to set up the Mainz Republic and later the Cisrhennanian Republic. These groups would also renew their separatist claims when it appeared that the introduction of liberalism and democracy in a United German national state would become increasingly unlikely.

This contrasted with the development in Limburg as part of the Netherlandic Kingdom. The Habsburgian Emperor did not reclaim his rights to the Southern Netherlands in 1814 and with the Principality of the Prince-Bishopric of Liege and the Duchy of Limburg being dissolved the status of Limburg was insecure until it was decided that the Dutch Prince Willem I should become the ruler of a united Netherlands which would include the seven provinces of the North, the formerly Habsburgian Netherlands in the south, the former Principality of Prince-Bishopric of Liege, the Duchy of Limburg, the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg and the other smaller territories in Limburg to the west of a line agreed upon with Prussia. In 1815, Prince Willem was promoted to become king of the Netherlands and he began planning to administrate the new United Kingdom of the Netherlands. In accordance to the Vienna conference he set
up a constitution and a first and second chamber but he also retained important rights to govern. Another result of the conference was the creation of the province of Limburg out of the previous dispersed territories although officially retaining the title “Duchy of Limburg” (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, page 279). Nevertheless, many important innovations from the French period were retained such as redistribution of property or the juridical “Code Napoleon” (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, pages 310-314), while to the East in the Rhineland the Prussian rulers attempted to introduce the Prussian rule as it was before 1795.

However, first discontent in the Southern Netherlands appeared when King Willem I introduced new language laws which subscribed the use of Dutch in all provinces north of the French-Dutch linguistic border (1819) and the use of Dutch as a second administrative language where French and German were until now the administrative languages (1823). Discontent grew when common education rules were introduced in 1828 which lead to fears that Northern protestant-Calvinistic values would also become part of the education in the catholic South. Finally, when Willem I tried to diminish the freedom of the media a petition was handed over to the Dutch authorities in the South by the various dissatisfied liberal, catholic and French speaking groups. Although Limburg was predominantly catholic, participation in the petition movement was nevertheless rather limited. The July revolution in Paris in 1830 which forced the French Emperor Charles X to resign finally gave the inspiration for a general rebellion in the Southern Netherlands in August 1830.

Although it was initially the lower classes who rebelled against the authorities due to food shortage caused by bad harvest and mismanagement in Brussels, this soon became a major movement against the Netherlandic administration once the bourgeoisie united with the lower classes to struggle for more autonomy of the Southern Netherlands. When it became apparent that the Netherlandic military was too weak to suppress the rebellion the movement demanded complete independence from the Netherlandic Kingdom and the formation of a Belgian state. The troops of King Willem I withdrew from the Southern Netherlands on 26/27 September 1830 and on 1st October 1830 an independent Belgium was declared. In February 1831 the new liberal Belgian constitution was introduced and the first democratic parliamentary elections were held 8th September 1831 (Portal belgium.be., Informatie en Diensten van de Overheid – Belgie vanaf 1830: De Opstand / Het Voorlopig Bewind en het Nationaal Congres, http://www.belgium.be/nl/over_belgie/land/geschiedenis/belgie_vanaf_1830/ontstaan_en_groei/voorlopig_bewind_en_nationaal_congres/). However, the value of vote was still not equal and reflected by the tax-return (thus the wealth of the voter) and women were excluded altogether from the right to vote (Guy Janssens en Ann Marynissen, Het Nederlands vroeger en nu, Leuven, 2005, ISBN 90-334-5782-2, page 146).

Somewhat more hesitantly Limburg followed the developments in the remaining Southern Netherlands until they eventually associated themselves with the new Belgian state. When in November 1831 Venlo finally declared loyalty towards the new Belgian state all Limburgian cities had associated themselves to Belgium except for the city of Maastricht which remained loyal to the Netherlandic King. But the status of Limburg remained disputed and due to international pressure which wanted to avoid that a French influenced Belgium would border directly to Prussia it was agreed in April 1839 that the province of Limburg was split roughly along the Maas. The Eastern part, including the city of Maastricht would remain under Northern Netherlandic control while the Western part would become permanently a part of Belgium. The Netherlandic King was given the chance to govern his part of Limburg in the same manner as the Eastern part of Luxembourg was allotted to him (as Grand-Duke) or fully integrate Limburg into the Northern Netherlands. A further twist came into play when it was also decided that the Western part of Luxembourg would be integrated into Belgium and since Luxembourg as a whole also formed a part of the German Federation of 1815 the federation demanded compensation and this demand was met by letting the Netherlandic Limburg (except the fortresses of Maastricht and Venlo) also become a part of
the German Federation as the Duchy of Limburg. This led to the curious situation that the laws of the Kingdom of the Netherlands were (re-) introduced while the laws of the German Federation also had to be applied. However, the membership in the German federation also brought Limburg closer to the neighbouring Lower Rhine, now under Prussian control and struggling to retain the liberal French laws now under pressure by the Prussian rule and it shared a common problem by being governed by a protestant ruler while being predominantly catholic itself. This association to the German Federation culminated in the Limburgian participation of the 1848 liberal German uprising and the dispatch of deputies to the German National Assembly.

In the meanwhile, the now wholly Prussian controlled Lower Rhine was in 1815 re-arranged, the majority became part of the province of Julich-Kleve-Berg while the South-West around Heinsberg-Aachen became part of the Grand Duchy Lower Rhine which extended all the way south to the Saar. In 1822, both provinces were united and became the “Rhin-Province”, the administrative seat was Koblenz. The Prussian King Willem III declared in 1815 that he intended to establish a constitution for Prussia as a whole but eventually refrained from it and created assemblies for each Prussian province which were elected according to the state, the seat of the assembly was Düsseldorf. This assembly had only limited powers and it could not set up laws. Nevertheless, it issued a strong protest when it rejected the request of the Prussian central authorities to introduce the Prussian laws which were predominantly aimed at retaining the privileges of the “ancient regime”. After substantial debate the Prussian authorities allowed the Rhine province to retain the French Napoleonic bourgeois laws including the “Code Civil” and “Code de Commerce” which ensured regulated and liberal legal conditions and allowed for creation of private limited companies, mortgage business and regulated trading courts. Through this the Rhineland acquired a somewhat separate status within the Prussian state which also influenced the development in Prussia as a whole. The isolated geographical position of the new Prussian Rhine province together with the also new Prussian province of Westphalia lead to first common initiatives of the two which increased after the industrialization due to the coal mining creating an interprovincial urban area stretching from the Westphalian Dortmung to the Rhenish Duisburg (NRW 2000, Die Preussenzeit, 30. April 1815 Wiener Kongress. Die preußischen Provinzen Rheinland und Westfalen entstehen, http://www.nrw2000.de/preussen/wiener_kongress.htm ). When in 1819 the freedom of speech and of press was curtailed in the German Federation in accordance to the Karlsbad resolution, the “Rhenanian Institutions” acted as a counterpart.

The reluctance of the Prussians authorities to establish the promised constitution lead to further activism in the Rhineland and the French July revolution of 1830 and the subsequent Belgian rebellion (which lead to the creation of the liberal Belgian constitutional monarchy) became a model for many Rhenish liberals, old links and sympathies would not die despite the new borders (Bernhard Schneider: Nationale Katholizismen. Die (kichen-)politische Situation und die grenzueberschreitende Kommunikation im Raum Rhein-Mosel-Maas zwischen 1815 und dem Ende der Kulturkampfzeit, Historismus und kulturelle Identitaet im Raum Rhein-Maas, 2008, page 66, http://books.google.co.uk/books? id=yWCYkrgALhgC&pg=PA66&lpg=PA66&dq=belgische+verfassung+vorbild+rheinischer+liberalism &source=bl&ots=KdoZ8UJb-o&sig=ZsdJDqZ2r2t7x-iyx35Guglcg&hl=de&sa=X&ei=ZSdJDqZ2r2t7x-iyx35Guglcg&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=belgische%20verfassung%20vorbild%20rheinischer%20liberalismus&f=false ). Another advanced petition brought forward by the Rhine province assembly was concerning equal rights for Jewish citizens and many economic restrictions were lifted by the Prussian state in 1845.

While in the Rhine province many French-liberal sympathies remained, the “Rhin-Crisis” of 1840 brought anti-French sentiments about in many parts of the German Confederation. The crisis originated in a diplomatic set-back for France in the Middle East which then lead to a more aggressive French re-action including demands for a return to Napoleonic expansion policies and claims for the left-bank Rhine province territory. This, in turn, invoked a sharp re-action of the nationalist minded part of the German
bourgeoisie and set the tone for future anti-French sentiments (Heinrich August Winkler, Deutschlands sonderbarer Weg, Zeit Online, Geschichte, 24-08-2010, http://www.zeit.de/zeit-geschichte/2010/03/Text-Interview/seite-1). In the Rhineland this provoked also pro-German sentiments as e.g. reflected by Nickolaus Becker’s poem “Die Wacht am Rhein” while pro-French sentiments prevailed reflected by the Düsseldorf born poet Heinrich Heine who denounced Becker’s anti-French sentiment and wrote in 1844:


English: I am the friend of the French just like I am the friend of all men if they are reasonable and good, and because I myself am not so stupid and bad as if I could desire, that my Germans and French, both the chosen people of humanity, break their neck for the advantage of England and Russia and for the malicious pleasure of all “Junkers” (East-Elbian aristocratic landowners) and parsons around the globe. Stay calm, I will not cede the Rhine to the French simply because the Rhine belongs to me. Yes, he belongs to me through my inalienable right of birth, I am the free Rhine’s even more free son, my cradle stood on the river’s bank and I cannot see why the Rhine should belong to anyone else than its native children.

Just as in the United Netherlandic Kingdom, industrialization in conjunction with the retention of economically liberal Napoleonic laws changed not only the economic development in the Rhineland but also the society and welfare. A new urban lower class developed which grew in numbers and general education introduced in the French period enabled also rural agricultural workers to express their poverty and problems and voice their demands. Growing unemployment and severe poverty in rural areas due to mechanization lead also to increased emigration. The Rhenish-Prussian administrative district of Trier, which consisted of many poor rural areas, lost 10% of its population in the period from 1844 until 1871 due to emigration, mainly to America, (Landesverband Rheinland, Wir Rheinländer > Die Revolution von 1848 > Auswanderung, http://www.wir-rheinlaender.lvr.de/revolution_1848/die_auswanderung.htm ). The rural poverty and low pay for workers in the new industrial cities became also key factors of the general rebellions and revolutions which broke out all over Europe in 1848 (Landesverband Rheinland - Portal Rheinische Geschichte: Vom Wiener Kongress zur Revolution von 1848/1849, 6. Die Revolution von 1848/1849 im Rheinland: Eine Kurzfassung – Ablauf der Revolution, 04-10-3013, http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/epochen/epochen/Seiten/1815bis1848.aspx ).

While separate laws and administration for both the Rhineland and the Southern Netherlands had changed irrevocably after the Vienna Congress the linguistic situation began to change as well and divided the Lower Rhine from Limburg ever more. While the Habsburgian areas in Limburg adopted standard Dutch as official language, the Brandenburg-Prussian dominated areas of the Lower Rhine switched increasingly to standard German as this was the official language of the Brandenburg-Prussian administration. This resulted into temporary Dutch-Standard German bilingualism in the former Duchy of Cleves (with the exception of the areas south of the river Lippe on the right bank of the Rhine which were Germanized already before). Dutch was used in particular for local and rural issues and was still the dominant church language until 1815. The old Rhine-Maas standard script used until the 16th century was by then long forgotten and the areas belonging to the archbishopric Cologne, the Duchy of Berg and Julich (Gullick) had switched to standard German as administrative language ever since. In the areas belonging to the Duchy of Geldern, the Dutch administrative language was retained until the end of the French occupation,
including the Geldrian enclave Viersen in the South although the upper quarter of Geldern was Brandenburg-Prussian ruled after 1713 as well.

The process to properly “Germanize” the territory of the former Duchy of Geldern which became a part of the Prussian Rhine-Province began in earnest after 1815. An apparent decree during that period from the small town of Wachtendonk is mentioned by Henrich’s “Geschichte Wachtendonks” (Georg Cornelissen: Das Niederlaendische im preussischen Gelderland und seine Abloesung durch das Deutsche, Bonn, 1986, ISBN 3-7928-0488-3, page 142) which read that “all officials and judges are to use the German language”. This decree was probably aimed at the use of French but since it only encourages the use of “German” meaning standard German it was obviously also discouraging the use of Dutch. This set the context and soon the authorities pressured for all education and eventually all church services to be conducted in standard German only. However, according to Cornelissen (Georg Cornelissen: Das Niederlaendische im preussischen Gelderland und seine Abloesung durch das Deutsche, Bonn, 1986, ISBN 3-7928-0488-3, page 142) no official decree was ever issued prohibiting the use of Dutch so the process of Germanization was not done by using legislation and official decrees but in a more subtle way. Although the dialects at the Lower Rhine are Lower Franconian and thus Dutch in character they were effectively categorized as “Low German dialects” similar to the Low Saxon dialects in Northern Germany and in that sense Dutch on Prussian territory was not regarded as a language in its own right (see also chapter 10.1). Just like for Dutch at the Lower Rhine, no decree was ever issued prohibiting the use of Low Saxon in Northern Germany, however, the use of Low Saxon in official and literary context eventually ceased through a process of in-official discrimination. By Regarding Low Saxon as a mere dialect in comparison to Standard German and increasingly denying it cultural value, especially after Luther’s bible translation, the educated and bourgeois classes in Northern Germany more or less voluntarily adopted standard German as their written linguistic model. Did the educated classes previously use Latin to also document their status in contrast to the common people, they could now use standard German in the same way in Lutheran Northern Germany without appearing disloyal to the Teutonic peoples although they effectively did exactly that in regard to the Low Saxon and Low Franconian (Dutch) speakers because Standard German was initially incomprehensible to them. A good example of this subtle and half officially prohibition of Dutch is a letter of the Prussian authorities in Düsseldorf sent to the Bishop of Münster in 1827 which reads:

“The promotion of (Standard) German lessons in primary schools in the districts of Gelderen, Cleves and Rees is severely disrupted by the fact that the half-Dutch (Hollandic) dialect common in this areas is not only used in civil businesses but also used, in particular, by older priests to conduct religious lessons and also preaching in it. Subsequently, schools are required to provide simultaneously lessons in Dutch and Standard German which has a very adverse effect on the spiritual development for these students.” (Helga Bister-Broosen: Niederländisch am Niederrhein, 1998, ISBN 3-631-32578-9, page 95)

In the former Duchy of Geldern the change from Dutch to Standard German was not abrupt, a transitional period began after the “Encouragement for the use of German” was issued and was effectively finished when the last of the old “Dutch” administrators, teachers and priests went into pension by the end of the 1830s. From about 1840 onwards no Dutch was taught on any schools in the Lower Rhine area any longer. A similar process was “encouraged” concerning the church language: Here the germanization was made official through the Bishop of Münster after 1827 although Dutch church sermons and bible lessons still took place in smaller villages until 1840; again, as with schooling, once the old priests died or retired the successors used standard German only from that moment. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church at the Lower Rhine was reluctant and in 1828 a petition was handed in to be allowed to maintain Dutch bible lessons which were temporarily granted but this did not halt the process of the Germanization. Occasionally protests were uttered by local priests, a prominent case was the reluctance of pastor Tilmans in Straelen to preach or teach standard German (Georg Cornelissen: Das Niederlaendische im
In the areas which formed part of the Duchy of Cleves the bilingualism of Dutch and standard German was also maintained for a few decades after the establishment of the new Netherlandic-Prussian border in 1815 until the old generation of priests and teachers died or went into pension, no Dutch teaching or preaching is reported from the former Duchy of Cleves after 1850.

This manifested a linguistic split along the new border between the Netherlands and the German Federation although vocally the dialects remained the main spoken medium and thus intelligibility across the border in spoken form much longer and well into the 20th century (see also chapter 10.3.)

8.2. The European Uprising of 1848

In 1848 unrest, rebellion and uprising spread all over Europe and affected also Limburg and the Lower Rhine. The uprising was inspired by the French uprising in February 1848 which, in turn, was caused by dissatisfaction with King Louis Philippe whose administration was made responsible for economic hardship (“Pauperism”) and increasing attempts to limit the freedoms achieved in the previous decades. In addition, an increasing literacy rate among the common people including the new urban working classes brought greater awareness of injustice and inequality and lead to demands for reform and more common participation which, in turn, resulted in upheavals in many parts of Europe, including the German Confederation, the Austrian Empire, Denmark, and Italy. The March uprising in the German Confederation affected both the Lower Rhine and Limburg since both constituted a part of it and the calls for democracy, justice, equality and a constitution were generally greeted enthusiastically in both the Lower Rhine and Limburg. Once the Frankfurt National Assembly was constituted a significant movement sprang up in Limburg to have Limburg fully separated from the Netherlands and integrated into the proposed liberal and democratic German national state. This is interesting because while there existed a movement in the Rhineland (the Cisrhenanians etc.) to secede from Holy Roman Empire and later Prussia as a part of the German Confederation and Empire there also existed a movement in Limburg which supported secession from the Netherlands and joining a future German national state. This movement had its origin in the dissatisfaction of Limburg being attached to the Netherlands instead of the new Belgian state with its liberal constitution. But not only liberal-democratic supporters constituted the separatists movements in both Limburg and the Rhineland, also political Catholicism played a part since both Limburg and the Rhineland were ruled by predominantly protestant states which many viewed with unease (Landschaftsverband Rheinland, Portal Rheinische Geschichte, Epochen und Ereignisse, Vom Wiener Kongress zur Revolution von 1848/1849, http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/EPOCHEN/EPOCHEN/Seiten/1815bis1848.aspx).

Once a reunion with Belgium appeared unrealistic the movement campaigned for Limburg receiving a similar status as the one of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg which was ruled by the Netherlandic king in personal union. When the German National Assembly was created to establish a liberal-democratic German national state this appeared an attractive alternative for the separatist movement in Limburg. Popular support for this movement derived from high taxes imposed on the Limburgian citizens, which were collected through a poll tax. However, the leaders of this movement were entirely of aristocratic origin (Graaf de Marchant d’Ansembourg, Baron van Scherpenzeel Heusch, Baron de Weichs de Wenne en de Graaf van Hoensbroek) motivated by the prospect of a new tax on possession suggested by the Netherlandic secretary of state F.A. van Hall in order to reduce public debt (A.M.J.A. Berkvens: Staatkundig Geschiedenis van ‘Limburg’ 1794-1867, 4. Het hertogdom Limburg als lidmaat van de Duitse Bond en als Nederlandse provincie (1839-1867), December 2008, http://law.maastrichtuniversity.nl/lrg/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/staatkundige-geschiedenis-limburg-
Two representatives from Limburg were elected into the Frankfurt National Assembly who applied for full membership of the Duchy of Limburg in the German Confederation. While this separatist movement arose in Limburg, simultaneously voices were renewed to create a Rhenish state as a federal state (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, according to Rottecks and Welckers state-encyclopedia from 1842, page 731).

The fact that separatist’s movements existed as well in the Rhineland as in Limburg confirms the ambiguous position both the Lower Rhine and Limburg still had in respect to the larger national states surrounding them. Although linguistic and national awareness was not completely absent (the petition by the Lower Rhine priests in protest when Dutch was effectively abolished as a church language in the Lower Rhine is a good example) the emphasis was a political-liberal and political-catholic one and, in general, both Limburg and the Lower Rhine remained open to join any national state as long as this promised a liberal-democratic future with respect to catholic traditions. The separatist and regionalist movements in Limburg and the Rhineland manifest how similar the fate of this two areas remained despite the borders which had been established after 1815. The people did not regard themselves as belonging to different nationalities because they could find themselves inside a Belgium state (shown through the reference of Rhenanian liberal activists in that period) or in a liberal German national state as promoted by Limburgian activists. Even the option of becoming effectively sovereign, autonomous or completely independent was considered among groups such as the Cisrhenanians or those Limburgian separatists demanding similar status as Luxembourg for Limburg. If both these movements had succeeded it would have been interesting if that had eventually lead to a common Rhenish-Limburgian-Luxembourgian state or perhaps even a union with Belgium in the long run.

Although the German Uprising booked initial success and general democratic elections for a Prussian state parliament were held in May 1848 it was not able to sustain itself and the old aristocratic forces were able to re-establish the power. A turning point came in September 1848 when two conservative deputies were killed by a left-wing rebellion in Frankfurt. This caused the Prussian authorities to interfere and re-establish the aristocratic power despite local attempts in the Rhineland to prevent this with the help of local civic forces. Nevertheless, in December 1848 a Prussian constitution was drawn up, however, this constitution was designed by the Prussian authorities and not the parliament and it included a variety of limitations for democracy as e.g. the “Three-class-election-legislation” meaning that the weight of the vote would be in proportion to the amount of tax being paid. To add on this, the parliament had in most sectors of government only an advisory role and was lacking real powers to curtail the policies of the Prussian government which was elected by the Prussian King and not by the parliament. It retained some powers to veto the state budget but even that right was frequently challenged by the Prussian government. Eventually in March 1849 the National Assembly in Frankfurt agreed on an “Empirical” Constitution which suggested a constitutional monarchy under Prussian dominance but this was then rejected by the Prussian King whose position was by then re-established to a degree that he did not need to resign to such a role. Popular barricade battles arose to push through this constitution but were eventually unsuccessful and the Prussian authorities quelled and repressed the democratic upheavals eventually (Landschaftsverband Rheinland: Rheinische Geschichte, Epochen und Ereignisse, Vom Wiener Kongress zur Revolution von 1848/1849 - 6. Die Revolution von 1848/ 1849 im Rheinland: Eine Kurzfassung, http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/epochen/epochen/Seiten/1815bis1848.aspx#11 ). Although the uprising and the establishment of German National Assembly proved to be unsuccessful it was nevertheless a further stepping stone for the Rhineland but also for Limburg to push for more democracy and to retain the liberal values established during the French occupation between 1795 and 1815.

In Limburg the failure of the German uprising resulted in re-integration into the Netherlands, in particular, since simultaneously the general European rebellion of 1848 left also its mark on the Netherlands. Already in 1844 a group of deputies in the State general around Johan Rudolph Thorbecke...
demanded democratic-liberal reforms from the Dutch King which was initially denied but in the wake of the European rebellions of 1848 King Wilhelm II eventually gave in and the Netherlandic constitution was changed. Most important was the introduction of democracy and the reduction of the King’s influence, effectively establishing a constitutional monarchy (Parlement & Politiek, Grondwetsherzieningen 1815 – heden, http://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrgszxgrondwetsherzieningen_1815_heden ). The failure of the German uprising and the success of Thorbecke’s reforms decisively furthered the full integration of Limburg into the Netherlands but it was not until the outbreak of the Prussian-Austrian in 1866 and the subsequent dissolution of the German Confederation that Limburg’s connections to any future German state was also officially severed. Some doubts about the status of Limburg as part of the Netherlands were cast in 1867 when the Netherlandic King Willem III agreed with the French Emperor Napoleon to cease Luxembourg to France and gain full control over Limburg instead but this was opposed by Prussia. The Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck demanded Limburg be fully integrated into the new Northern German Confederation as compensation to cease Luxembourg to France. However, the second Treaty of London resolved the issue where it was agreed to leave Luxembourg in possession of the Netherlandic King but giving it de-facto independence while Limburg was now to be fully integrated into the Netherlandic Kingdom without any ties to any German state any longer (A.M.J.A. Berkvens, Staatkundige geschiedenis van ‘Limburg’ 1794-1867, http://www.rechten.unimaas.nl/lrg/pdf/staatkundige%20geschiedenis%20limburg%201794-1867.pdf ). But the ambiguous position of Limburg and its participation in both the Belgian state forming and German uprising gave Limburg a separate character which it would retain.

In the meanwhile, the Prussian authorities introduced reactionary measures in the Rhineland in an attempt to root out the persisting influences from the French period for ever. Although economic freedom was retained which lead to an immense economic upswing and industrialization, political freedom was curbed as far as possible with the excuse that “otherwise the Rhineland will eventually fall under French control. This fear was further exaggerated after Napoleon’s nephew Charles-Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte was declared French emperor in 1852 (Landschaftsverband Rheinland, Portal Rheinische Geschichte, Epochen und Ereignisse, Zwischen Revolution und Reichsgründung – Durchbruch zur Industrialisierung (1848 – 1871), http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/epochen/epochen/Seiten/1848bis1871.aspx ). But contrary to the intention, the repressive legislation imposed onto the Rhineland did not foster the integration and the popularity of the Prussian rule and lead to a lasting separate identity expressed whenever there was an opportunity to do so (e.g. during the traditional carnival festivities). Many Rhinelanders looked enviously to their Western neighbours who achieved democracy and liberal constitutions while the Rhineland, including the Lower Rhine, remained part of a reactionary Prussian state and this also held the ideas of separatism and autonomy alive.

When the Prussian King Wilhelm IV abdicated due to bad health in 1858 his son and successor Wilhelm V eased the repressive policies towards the Rhineland somewhat and introduced a new cabinet under the leadership of Otto von Bismarck in 1862. This raised hopes for more reforms but they were quickly disappointment when the new King and his administration choose to ignore the Prussian State parliament who opposed plans to increase the military budget by 25%. However, political parties were allowed to form and in 1861 the Progress Party was formed which represented the liberal minded opposition collectively in Prussia and became subsequently the most popular party in the Rhine Province. When the Prussian state attempted to introduce general secular education and abolish the Catholic Church’s privileges they were opposed by large parts of the Rhenish population and attempts were made to set up a political catholic representation. But it was not until 1870 when the “Centrum” (centrist) party was formed which then became the most popular party in the Rhine province (Landschaftsverband Rheinland, Portal Rheinische Geschichte, Epochen und Ereignisse, Zwischen Revolution und Reichsgründung – Durchbruch zur Industrialisierung (1848 – 1871) - Neuanfänge politischer Parteien in den 1860er Jahren, http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/epochen/epochen/Seiten/1848bis1871.aspx ).
As already mentioned above the last administrative bond which remained between the Lower Rhine and Limburg was severed in 1867 when the German Confederation was declared defunct after the Prussian-Austrian war and the Netherlandic King in his role as Duke of Limburg decided quickly to keep Limburg (and also Luxembourg which he ruled in personal union) out of the Northern German federation set up by Prussia as a successor. Thereafter Limburg and the Lower Rhine were definitely divided into three states (Belgium, the Netherlands and the Northern German Federation which then became the German Empire in 1871), but linguistic intelligibility remained between the Lower Rhine and Limburg since the Lower Franconian dialects were continued by the population. However, the tightened administrative borders lead to increasing linguistic differences, caused cross border exchanges to decrease and the “other side” was increasingly viewed “abroad”.

8.3. The Austro-Prussian, the French-Prussian war and the establishment of the German Empire in 1871 until the end of WWI

The Austro-Prussian war, caused out of conflict for leadership in what was to become a German Empire, also brought about a change in the views of many Rhinelanders. The war was initially greeted with outrage by the population in the Rhineland because they saw in catholic dominated Austria a potential guarantor for catholic traditions and a possible ally for a Rhenish federal state in a potential future German Empire (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, page 731). But the attitude changed once the Prussians appeared victorious and the moderate liberal and conservative bourgeoisie, in particular the business leaders, resigned to accept Prussian rule and choose to actively participate in it when they saw opportunities for themselves through the Prussian real- and power politics (Landschaftsverband Rheinland, Portal Rheinische Geschichte, Epochen und Ereignisse, Zwischen Revolution und Reichsgründung – Durchbruch zur Industrialisierung (1848 – 1871), http://www.rheinische-geschichte.lvr.de/epochen/epochen/Seiten/1848bis1871.aspx).

8.3.1. Establishment of the German Empire in 1871

Another important event which further increased the popularity of the Prussian administration was the success of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 which was caused by a dispute over the Spanish royal succession and an attempt by France to curtail further Prussian expansion and influence in Southern Germany, then still independent from Prussia. These disputes encouraged the French Emperor Napoleon III to declare war on Prussia in July 1870 but Bismarck was able to raise the support of the Southern German states for his case and together they defeated the French armies at the battle of Sedan. Napoleon had to abdicate and the third French Republic was declared while Prussia took the opportunity to unite the Southern German states with the Northern German Confederation, acquire Alsace-Lorraine and proclaim the German Empire in Versailles in January 1871 inheriting the now vacant Emperor Crown after Napoleon’s abdication (Deutsches Historisches Museum, Der Deutsch-Französische Krieg 1870/71, http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/kaiserreich/aussenpolitik/krieg1870/index.html).

The period after 1871 was characterized by industrial growth, new technical development and also the introduction of the first social welfare laws. The industrial towns in the Lower Rhine became a key to the economic success in the subsequent years and those parts of the Rhenish bourgeoisie which profited from those advances inside the Prussian state and the German Empire became loyal citizens despite the lack of proper democracy and civil rights. In return, Prussia and the German Empire realized the potential of increasing power through the industrialization of the Lower Rhine and therefore promoted the development. Attempts to curb the influence of the Catholic Church in the catholic dominated Rhineland were greeted with resistance and the catholic-social orientated Centre party developed into the strongest political party in the Rhineland representing also Rhenish regional interests in the Prussian State.
parliament and later the German general parliament, the “Reichstag”. The Centre party often collaborated with the Polish party due to the common catholic background and interests (Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg: Deutsche & Polen, Polnische Reichstagsfraktion, http://www.deutscheundpolen.de/themen/thema_jsp/key=polfraktion.html). The subsequent “Kulturkampf” (cultural struggle) between the Centre Party and the Bismarck government revived Rhenish doubts about the ambitions of Prussian rule. However, despite the popularity of the Centre Party in the Rhineland they were unable to prevent the introduction of exclusive secular education and civil ceremonies required for weddings. Another important political party became the socialists who were in particular popular in the new industrial cities on the East bank of the Rhine such as Elberfeld, Barmen, Duisburg, Hamborn and Essen.

In 1875 and in 1887/1888 the so called “Dotationsgesetze” (dotation-laws) granted the Rhineprovince increased domestic administration in among others social welfare and health, culture and road construction and compensated for some of the still existing demands for Rhenish home rule. This effectively ended the “Kulturkampf” and the subsequent economic upswing, the establishment of the German Empire and the expectations of this Empire under Prussian leadership becoming a major global player fostered the integration of the Rhineprovince into Prussia and the German Empire until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. But another important factor of the suppression of anti-Prussian and separatist movements was the increased nationalism which became ever more aggressive after the formation of the German Empire in 1871. In contrast to the French national state, the German national state was not a result of a popular uprising and the constitution was not a result of a popular and democratic process, it was the creation of the old aristocracy and since they opposed liberalism and democracy they needed to create different symbols and myths for the unified German national state. The national-chauvinist ideas promoted already by Fichte, Arndt and Jahn and others at the turn of the 18th century who declared the “German” people as superior served as a well received substitute. Thus the extreme nationalists increased their influence through this process and their chauvinism became also increasingly racist, anti-Semitic and exclusive with expansive territorial ambitions. In their eyes a “German” was defined by ethno-racist characteristic and thus German citizenship became defined by lineage. The supremacy of the “German race” would also justify expansionist ambitions; to colonize and dominate conquered people and increase the power of the German nation became the ultimate goal towards all policies and initiatives had to be directed to. Nationalistic clubs and student fraternities (“Schlagende Verbindungen”) and all culture which glorified “Germaness” was encouraged, military service heralded as a heroic duty for the German nation and a symbol of manhood and the education was directed to enhance the German nationalism (Hans-Ulrich Wehler: Der deutsche Nationalismus, http://gepeskonyv.btk.elte.hu/adatok/Germanisztika/111Balk%E1nyi/Horv%E1thPabis/17-Der %20deutsche....pdf). This character was also described in Heinrich Mann’s novel “Der Untertan” (The Loyal Subject).

8.3.2. Bismarck

Otto von Bismarck was born 1st of April 1815 into a Prussian East-Elbian aristocratic family and rose to become Prussian chancellor 1862 and chancellor of the German Empire from 1871 until 1890, when he resigned. He was described as reactionary and authoritarian but also as a realist and pragmatist who understood that other powers in Europe had to be reckoned with and subsequently created a balance-of-power diplomacy. He appeared, first of all, as a Prussian patriot who saw his role as Prussian chancellor as a task to retain the power of his King and the Prussian aristocracy, to which he belonged, and to increase it whenever possible. When he was talking about “we” he meant Prussian power which he saw obstructed by the German Confederation where Austria and the Habsburgian Emperor had the final word (Golo Mann, Deutsche Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts, Frankfurt, 1958, ISBN 978-3-10-047920-4, chapter “Bismarck”, page 326). He looked for a way to break out of these barriers but reckoned with the resistance of other powers and waited until the tide turned favourably for Prussia.
policy led to the successful acquisition of Sleswick-Holsten in 1864, the victory against Austria in 1866 and finally against France in 1870 without tipping the balance of power in Europe to Prussian disadvantage. He despised democracy and liberalism and rejected ideas of popular participation, this was to be solely reserved for the inherited nobility (Golo Mann, Deutsche Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts, Frankfurt, 1958, ISBN 978-3-10-047920-4, page 436) but in the wake of the revolutions of the previous decades he realized that some concessions had to be made in order to prevent a popular uprising which could prove disastrous for the monarchy. A typical move for Bismarck was introduction of social welfare legislation in 1883 (Deutsche Sozialversicherung Europavertretung: Geschichte, http://www.deutsche-sozialversicherung.de/de/krankenversicherung/geschichte.html), which had been demanded by socialist groups and parties for long, while prohibiting the Socialist party at the same time. But he also recognized and used a growing German nationalistic movement to his advantage seeing in them the “lesser evil” than the liberals and democrats. This nationalistic movement, inhibiting many chauvinistic and ethnically exclusive views, began to challenge the aristocracy by demanding to be accepted, at least, as equals to them, something he might have underestimated and contributed to his eventual downfall in 1890. The restrictions introduced towards the use of minority languages during the 1880s and 1890s, including French in the Belgium bordering Malmedy district and Danish in Sleswick, looks as such a move designed to satisfy the demands of those nationalist movements (see chapter 5.1.3).

Bismarck became celebrated for creating the “German Empire” thus unifying the German Confederation into a national state, even if his German Empire excluded Austria and other smaller territories such as Luxembourg or Liechtenstein which formerly where a part of the German Confederation. This brought him a glorified status among many German nationalists and he was used as a model for the heroic individual (Golo Mann, Deutsche Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts, Frankfurt, 1958, ISBN 978-3-10-047920-4, page 492/193), although the upcoming racism and ethnic discrimination was alien to him and his feudalistic views. His rejection of racist views became obvious when he ignored a petition to restore anti-Semitic laws, abolished by the German constitution of 1871 which granted the Jews full German citizenship in 1881 (Deutsches Historisches Museum, LeMO, Kaiserreich, Innenpolitik: Die “Antisemiten-Petition”, http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/kaiserreich/innenpolitik/aspet/index.html). But his “Realpolitik” (a system of politics based on practical, and not necessarily moral, considerations (Robert McNamara: Otto von Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor, The Master of "Realpolitik" Unified Germany, About.com Guide, http://history1800s.about.com/od/leaders/a/bismarckbio.htm)) policies began to collide with the ambitions of the German nationalists who wanted the Empire to become a major global player if not even the major global power. They believed they no longer needed to maintain Bismarck’s systems of balance and agreements in Europe and many historians see in this a final turning point for Prussian-German politics and its outlook and relationship to the rest of Europe. When they called on acquiring overseas colonies, Bismarck was reluctant because he saw no real use from it and expected more trouble from overseas colonies in the long run than benefits. He then collided with the new Emperor Wilhelm II, who doubted the usefulness of the Socialist party’s prohibition laws from 1878 but also had an open ear for a more risky foreign policy. When Bismarck tried to renew and toughen the anti-socialist laws, Wilhelm II rejected the law in 1890 and Bismarck finally resigned. But being glorified as the individual bringing the “Germans” together his conservative views were used to define German-hood and thus liberals, socialists, ethnic minorities and Catholics (as e.g. the Catholic Rhinelanders), who all opposed Bismarck and his politics in one way or the other, became accused of “disloyalty” or being “un-German” (Hans-Ulrich Wehler: Der deutsche Nationalismus, page 72, http://gepeskonyv.btk.elte.hu/adatok/Germanisztika/111Balk%E1nvi/Hory%E1thPabis/17-Der%20deutsche....pdf) by the nationalists.

Bismarck died on his estate at Friedrichsruh near Hamburg in 1898. The re-admission of the social-democrats in 1891 and a more generally tolerant political attitude, at least temporarily, encouraged the Socialists and Catholics to declare their ultimate loyalty and support towards the German national case and the defence of the “sacred” national state in order to prevent being accused as potential traitors. In
This made nationalistic extreme ideas ever more acceptable in the general public, in particular to those who profited by the economic upswing after 1871. Bismarck established the German Empire as an authoritarian state and filled in the gap in central Europe between the other European powers but also laid the root for a philosophy which set the national state above everything and where the individual has to pay duty to the interest of the state and its people. Once this attitude was supplemented with chauvinist, racist and anti-Semitic ideas the result was fatal and was one of the main causes of WWI and WWII. The later West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer declared in his memorials: “The German people were suffering in all parts of society under a wrong idea of state, state power and the position of the individual in regard to the state for decades. They had made the state an idol and levied it onto the altar: the individual, its honour and its value had been sacrificed for this idol. The conviction of state omnipotence, of the priority of the state and its collective power above everything else, including the eternal goods of mankind, had gained power in Germany after the successful war of 1871 and the subsequent stormy industrial economic rise for the first time” (Konrad Adenauer: Erinnerungen 1945-1953, Stuttgart 1965, ISBN 3 421 01140 0., http://www.konrad-adenauer.de/files/7613/8746/5768/Adenauer_Erinnerungen.pdf, page 44).

8.3.3. 1890 - 1918

In the meanwhile the economy and industrialization, steamed ahead and increased military investment culminated into a belief of invincibility, a national furore also affecting the Rhineland and the onset of WW I. The German leadership under Wilhelm II believed it could afford a more aggressive stand towards its Western and Eastern neighbours and once Russia became allied to France and the United Kingdom after the German Empire refused to renew the non-aggression pact, the danger of increasing isolation and a two-front war arose. A more aggressive tone was also chosen in reference to global policies when the state secretary and later chancellor Bernhard von Bülow declared in 1897 that “the times when the German would leave the soil to one of its neighbours, the other the sea, and reserves the sky to himself [...] - those days are over” (Bayerische Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit: Der Erste Weltkrieg, Vorgeschichte und Ausbruch, "Weltpolitik", http://www.blz.bayern.de/blz/web/erster_weltkrieg/2.html).

This showed that nationalistic chauvinistic agitation had finally gained such influence that the national leadership had to adopt at least some of their demands. A new generation which had been indoctrinated by the improved education system supported this positions largely (Raphael Timmermann (Zur nationalen Integration fremdnationaler ethnischer Minderheiten und ihren sozialpolitischen Konsequenzen, dargestellt am beispiel der deutschsprachigen Gesellschaftlichen Gruppen Eupen-Malmedy zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen, Frankfurt, 1989, ISBN 3-631-41619-9, page 202) and many of them enthusiastically volunteered for the army once war was declared in August 1914. Increased military spending of the European powers and a more aggressive tone on all sides made the peace more and more fragile until the assassination of the Austrian crown prince in July 1914 by a Serbian nationalist and the subsequent Austrian declaration of war on Serbia caused a chain reaction which resulted in WW I where the German Empire and Austria-Hungary where pegged on the one side against France, the United Kingdom and Russia on the other.

Still, many in the Rhineland and the Lower Rhine, particularly those associated to the catholic Centre Party and the socialists, remained sceptical towards the “glory” of the German Empire. They retained reservations and “separatist” ambitions against Prussian dominance which would come to the fore once the disastrous defeat of the German Empire became a fact in 1918.

The defeat of the German Empire and the abdication of Wilhelm II in 1918 came as a shock to many patriotic minded Germans but it opened the door towards true democracy and liberalism and also for a revival of Rhenish separatism from Prussia and these groups took initiative as soon as the surrender was declared and Wilhelm II abdicated.
In the meanwhile the situation in Limburg settled down after 1867 and it was generally accepted that the Eastern part became an integral part of the Netherlandic constitutional monarchy, while the Western part remained a province of the Belgian constitutional monarchy. Slow industrialization and poverty characterized the development in Limburg in that period, demands for better living conditions of the urban working classes arose by socialist groups while simultaneously a movement appeared in the Netherlandic Limburg which aimed at preserving catholic rights and traditions in the protestant dominated Netherlandic Kingdom (RKK: Katholicisme - Rijke Roomse Leven - gebaseerd op het artikel van H. Witte, 'Geloven gaat verder': de kern van de weg van de Kerk in Nederland. http://www.rkk.nl/katholicisme/encyclopedie/r/rijke_roomse_leven ). Politically, this movement was represented by the Roman-Catholic State Party (RKSP) which was dominated by an elite of entrepreneurs, large agricultural landowners and teachers, however, its tight attachment to the catholic church ensured that it also got the majority of votes of catholic lower classes (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, page 375). Once again, this development was reminiscent to the political development in the Lower Rhine. As a consequence of a constitutional change in the Netherlands, the official title “Duchy of Limburg” was altered into “Province of Limburg” which then finalized the political integration process into the Netherlandic Kingdom. Luxembourg remained in personal union under King Wilhelm III until his death in 1890 when it was passed to the House of Nassau-Weilburg due to a Nassau inheritance pact of 1783 and, thus, finally gained its own dynasty (Embassy of Luxembourg in London, History, Luxembourg as an Independent Country, http://londres.mae.lu/en/General-Information-about-Luxembourg/History ). The increasing industrialization which appeared in Limburg, in particular through coal-mining from 1900 onwards, brought also changes about in the Limburgish society. Lack of local labour made the mining industry inviting workers from other parts of the Netherlands and even Europe to work in Limburg. As a result, the indigenous population saw their traditions and local Limburgish speech under threat and responded by setting up cultural organizations with the aim of protecting and promoting Limburgish, such as V.E.L.D.E.K.E (Voor Een Limburgs Dialect Een Krachtige Eenheid) in 1926 (Dr. P.J.H. Ubachs: Handboek voor de geschiedenes van Limburg, Hilversum, 2000, ISBN 90-6550-097-9, page 451).

During WW I the Netherlands managed to keep its neutrality and thus was not involved in the conflict but Belgian Limburg became occupied by German troops after the German Empire attacked Belgium as part of their general offensive against France. After offering some stiff resistance the Belgian army was pushed back and most of Belgium, including the province of Limburg, was occupied by German troops until 1918. The occupation was devastating for the Belgian economy and resulted in high unemployment after the war (Portaal Belgium.be: Over Belgie, België als onafhankelijke staat (1830 tot vandaag, Wereldoorlogen, http://www.belgium.be/nl/over_belgie/land/geschiedenis/belgie_vanaf_1830/ ). In the Lower Rhine, WWI also had devastating effects on the economy and brought about a lot of changes once the German Empire surrendered. When the hopeless position of the German troops in 1918 was realized a mutiny broke out in the German navy against further senseless attacks which spread rapidly and eventually caused the German military leadership to ask the Western Allies for a ceasefire and effectively to accept surrender in November 1918. An uprising broke loose which resulted in a democratically minded government and liberal politicians took over from the old aristocratic leadership. Eventually Emperor Wilhelm II had to abdicate and a Republic was declared. The cease fire agreed on 11th November 1918 included a provision where the German Empire acquiesced occupation of the Rhineland to the West of the Rhine, including bridgeheads around Koblenz, Mainz and Cologne, by allied troops which was then carried out by French, Belgian and British troops in December 1918. Fearing a Bolshevist revolution modelled on the Russian Revolution of 1917, the new German Government, consisting of moderate Social democrats cooperating with the liberal and democratic minded bourgeois politicians opted to leave the imperial anti-democratically minded administrative and executive structure in place in order to prevent a communist take-over, chaos and anarchy. Together with the imperial administration the new “Weimar” government was able to suppress the Bolsheviks takeovers such as the Bavarian Soviet
The Republic declared in April 1919, but maintenance of the “old” imperial administration had severe consequences later on when the democracy was endangered and eventually swept away by the extreme right-wing national-socialist (Heinrich August Winkler, Weimar: "Ein deutsches Menetekel". In: Ders. / Alexander Cammann (Hg.), Weimar. Ein Lesebuch zur deutschen Geschichte 1918-1933. C. H. Beck, München 1997, S. 15 ff., http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/nationalsozialismus/dossier-nationalsozialismus/168748/vom-kaiserreich-zur-republik-1918-19?p=3 ). The subsequent peace negotiations with the Western Allies in May 1919 ended with the so called Treaty of Versailles which had the following consequences for the Rhineland:

1. Prolonged occupation of the Rhineland by French, Belgian and British troops for 15 years

2. The districts of Eupen and Malmedy which formed a part of the Prussian Rhineprovince were ceased to Belgium

3. The Saar was put under control of the League of Nations, its final status was to be decided by a plebiscite after 15 years.

4. Reparations by the German Empire as consequences of admitting responsibility for provoking the war.

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8.4. The transfer of Eupen – Malmedy from the German Empire to Belgium after WWI

The transfer of the Eupen-Malmedy territory to Belgium, including the tiny neutral territory of Moresnet was the only lasting border-change after 1815 which affected the Lower Rhine and Limburg. Although the territory is to the south of the modern core Limburg-Lower Rhine area, the municipalities of Eupen, Lontzen and Kelmis (the former Neutral Moresnet) are traditionally Lower Franconian speaking, thus north of the Benrath Line in contrast to Raeren and the area around Malmedy-St. Vith., which are Ripuarian and Mosel-Franconian (Luxembourgeois). Thus, theoretically, the three Lower Franconian municipalities could have also been associated to the Dutch speaking Belgian community, however, due to the use of standard German over the centuries, they chose to retain the standard German language as official in the whole district (as was also later confirmed by the Belgian language laws in 1963). After the territory was transferred by the Versailles Treaty in 1920, standard German was immediately declared an official language in the district (Standard German was already recognized as one of the “langues usitees” in Belgium since 1830) and thus education (Primary school law of 1921) and public services were continued in German as before, however, the pre-war teachers had to sign a loyalty declaration before being allowed to continue and only 4 out of 132 pre-war teachers signed this declaration which shows how German-nationalistic minded the education was before the war. The vacant posts were then filled in by German speaking teachers from areas around Montzen and Arel and this immediately brought a change to national orientation of the education (Raphael Timmermann: Zur nationalen Integration fremdnationaler ethnischer Minderheiten und ihren sozialpolitischen Konsequenzen, dargestellt am beispiel der deutschsprachigen Gesellschaftlichjen Gruppen Eupen-Malmedy zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen, Frankfurt, 1989, ISBN 3-631-41619-9, page 2020/203).

In 1926, Belgium granted the inhabitants Belgian citizenship and thus they were allowed to participate in general elections (Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens: Zur Geschichte der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, http://www.dglive.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-1053/1532_read-20359/ ). Because of this situation the Eupen-Malmedy district was one of the few areas in the Rhineland where the population
could express their national feelings and if so, also voice their pro- or anti-Prussian or German sentiments. But the following election results do not show a clear picture. The Belgian authorities attempted to immediately integrate the district into the Belgian state and designed the constituencies in such a form that they were also associated (to a larger) part to old-Belgian (thus Wallonian) constituencies in order to hamper the formation of an ethnic-German regional party. This was initially successful and the Belgian-wide operating Catholic People’s Party was able to attract the potential of the previously popular catholic Rhenish Centre-Party vote. However, in 1929, due to a dispute, the Eupen-Malmedy wing of the Belgian Catholic Party seceded and formed the Christian People’s party (CVP) which became effectively a Belgian subdivision of the Rhenish-Prussian Centre Party (Die NS-Gaue: Regionale Mittelinstanzen im zentralistischen"Führerstaat", by Jürgen John, Horst Möller, Thomas Schaarschmidt, Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Munich, Germany), http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6txs6cEx7SIC&pg=PA323&lpg=PA323&dq=christliche+volkspartei+Eupen&source=bl&ots=dLULKelfOk&sig=5SxEkPa20Z-GV1p5OriFHpv6rD8&hl=en&sa=X&ei=1FIIUbeUC8PA7QaPsYCA6g&ved=0CFYQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=christliche%20volkspartei%20Eupen&f=false). This party could then attract up to 52% the vote in Eupen-Malmedy at the general Belgian elections of 1929 (Raphael Timmermann, Zur nationalen Integration fremdnationaler ethnischer Minderheiten und ihren sozialpolitischen Konsequenzen, dargestellt am beispiel der deutschsprachigen Gesellschaftlichen Gruppen Eupen-Malmedy zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen, Frankfurt, 1989, ISBN 3-631-41619-9, page 258). This shows that the inhabitants clearly retained a different identity and were not fully integrated into the Belgian state by then but the election result neither proves an overwhelming sentiment for border revision because that was not on the agenda of the CVP. It also has to be taken in account that the CVP’s sister party and supporter, the Rhenish Centrist party, cannot be seen as a German nationalistic party but much more as a Rhenish regionalist and catholic party which itself collaborated with the minority parties in the parliaments as e.g. the Polish party. Thus, the CVP represented first of all a local regionalist sentiment but not necessarily a German nationalistic one.

In the wake of an increasing nationalist tone from across the border in Germany, the CVP began to agitate on a nationalistic pro-German platform but contrary to expectation, the CVP lost 12% of their vote at the next election in 1932 to the Belgian catholic party and the CVP also lost its absolute majority in the district (Raphael Timmermann, Zur nationalen Integration fremdnationaler ethnischer Minderheiten und ihren sozialpolitischen Konsequenzen, dargestellt am beispiel der deutschsprachigen Gesellschaftlichen Gruppen Eupen-Malmedy zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen, Frankfurt, 1989, ISBN 3-631-41619-9, page 225/226). Thus, it appears that a majority of the inhabitants by then obviously preferred further integration into the Belgian state. But this sentiment changed again with the Nazi take over in Germany and the CVP voluntarily accepted “Gleichschaltung” and promoted thereafter the extreme German nationalistic views of the Nazi-Party, including revision of the border. In the wake of the nationalist furore in Germany and the apparent “success” of the Nazi government this party, renamed to “Heimattreue Front” in 1936 received between 40 and 50% of the vote in Eupen-Malmedy (Eupen: 48,67%, Malmedy: 43,09%, St. Vith: 44,73%) at the general elections in 1939 (Verkiezingsdatabase, Resultaat voor Heimattreue Front in 1939, http://www.ibzdgip.fgov.be/result/nl/result_vt.php?date=1939-04-02&vt=CK&party_id=3457). But however strong this vote was, association to Nazi-Germany and border revision still did not form a majority in the district. This is also well documented in Raphael Timmermann’s “Zur nationalen Integration fremdnationaler ethnischer Minderheiten und ihren sozialpolitischen Konsequenzen, dargestellt am beispiel der deutschsprachigen Gesellschaftlichen Gruppen Eupen-Malmedy zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen”.

Finally, this development in Eupen-Malmedy could also be interpreted as prove for a never full heartedly support of Prussian-German dominance by the general public in the Rhineland after the Prussian take over in 1815 of which Eupen-Malmedy formed a part until 1920. Catholic dominance was still apparent and western-influenced liberal-democratic views were not reverted during 105 years of Prussian-German
rule. Even at the height of power of Nazi-Germany in 1939 (20 years after the Belgian annexation of Eupen-Malmedy), a German national party fell clearly short of an absolute majority in the district. It shows that German national sentiments in Eupen–Malmedy were a lot more muted and never formed a majority in its radical form in contrast to other areas severed from Germany through the Treaty of Versailles such as Gdansk or the Sudetenland. The case of Eupen-Malmedy shows a continuous ambiguous position and the majority of the population obviously saw the Catholic Church and its associated political organizations, whether Belgian, Dutch or German, as a guarantee for stability.

8.5. The Separatist and Autonomous movements in the Rhineland after WW I. until the establishment of North Rhine - Westphalia

Almost immediately after the German government signed the ceasefire in November 1918 and the impending allied occupation of the West bank of the Rhine, Rhenish autonomist and separatist movements appeared which demanded greater autonomy for the Rhineland from Prussia or even complete independence from the German Empire. While the autonomous movement was backed by a strong popular movement and initially the Rhenish Centre Party, the independence movement was never able to achieve massive popular support and effectively remained a splinter group backed to a certain degree by the occupying French forces. The general mood was to receive more autonomy or home rule after 100 years Prussian rule, a desire which obviously never disappeared from large parts of the Rhenish population despite agitation and the initial successes of the Prussian dominated German Empire. This was based upon a general feeling of inferiority of the mainly catholic Rhineland towards the protestant-Prussian elite (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, page 731). But in contrast to the situation in 1814, in 1918 many parts of the Rhineland were heavily industrialized which brought immigration to the Rhineland, in particular, to those industrial centres along the Ruhr and Wupper and new political movements had appeared such as the socialist and communist whose global outlook had only little sympathy for a Rhenish autonomous or separatist movement.

But with the looming prospect of, at least, temporary occupation of the Rhineland, or parts of it, by the victorious allies, many members of the Centre Party believed that disintegration of the Prussian state, if not even the German Empire was unavoidable. In order to prevent anarchy or perhaps even a communist takeover, the Rhineland should take matters into its own hands. The appearance of left wing and communist uprisings in many parts of the German Empire also brought fear among industrial owners of a radical left wing take over and in order to prevent this they supported the call for creation of a Rhenish Republic. Another important argument was the idea of creating a French and Western friendly “buffer-state” which could satisfy French security demands while keeping the economic links to the rest of the German Empire intact. Many autonomists within the Centre Party favoured the creation of a wider “West German” Republic which would include Westphalia and other mainly catholic areas such as Palatinate. The German surrender also spurred French ambitions to ‘regain” the left bank Rhineland which in parts of the French political elite was viewed as French territory lost to Prussia and the subsequent German Empire and they saw a chance to recover the Rhineland through promoting separatism.

The begin of the campaign was made by the “Kölnische Volkszeitung” (Cologne People’s newspaper), which was bought by the French government already in summer 1918 during financial troubles, on 11th November 1918 with an article emphasizing the need of a neutral Rhenish state to satisfy allied demands (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5, page 25). Subsequently, a meeting arranged by the Centre Party was prepared for 4th December of 1918 to discuss the prospects of the creation of a Rhenish Republic and on how to proceed. Although the initiative was taken by Cologne’s
mayor Konrad Adenauer he was not present at the meeting himself because by then he had been approached by the new German Republican government to interfere and stop the proceedings. Unwilling to do so, he completely refrained from appearing at the meeting and thus the following resolution for the creation of a Rhenish Republic inside the German Empire was taken:

“Five thousand Rhenish citizens, male and female, assembled in the Buergergesellschaft in Cologne, take the following decision: In consideration of the deeply rooted political disturbances in the German Empire, in recognition of the complete impossibility of creation of an orderly government in Berlin, in the conviction that the Rhenish lands together with Westphalia possess sufficient economic, cultural, and political strengths to form a state, the assembly expresses its will to preserve the unity of the Empire and to reconstruct a new German state from the lands of the Rhine and Westphalia. The assembly summons the acknowledged representatives of all parties in the Rhineland, Westphalia and other Rhenish lands to bring about the proclamation of an autonomous Rhenish Republic belonging to the Empire as soon as possible” (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, page 30, 1978, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5)

However, reaction against the autonomist declaration grew rapidly in Prussia’s capital Berlin and among other political parties. The council of People’s Plenipotentiaries, which through revolutionary measures took over the provisional government of the German Empire in November 1918, issued a declaration which denounced the Cologne Centre Party assembly as follows:

“We assert most decisively to all the name of the German people and Revolution against such strivings as those that occurred in Cologne. The unity of the German Empire is not protected but endangered by the baseless and unproved accusations that it is completely impossible to create an orderly government in Berlin. The Cologne decisions are suited….to weaken and hinder the marshalling of the strengths of the nation in this difficult transition from war to peace.” (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, page 32, 1978, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5)

Nevertheless, the new German social democratic president Friedrich Ebert, who succeeded the previous president von Baden on 9th November 1918, hinted re-organization of the German federal system but all decisions concerning the future boundaries of the German state, or the formation of new federal states were reserved for the National Assembly. Elections for the National Assembly, which were supposed to create a new national constitution, were announced for the 19th January 1919. In the meanwhile other Rhenish and Westphalian influential groups such as the leading industrialists of the Rhine-Ruhr district casts their doubts about the Centre Party’s declaration and feared complete separation from the German marked which they viewed as vital for survival of the economy. Neither did they regard closer association to the French economy as a viable alternative. It became obvious that reservations and resistance existed against any kind of separatism or autonomy from the German Empire and the Prussian state which lead to a slow retreat from the Cologne declaration inside the Centre Party when they had to reckon that such moves may be suppressed by all means from the German-Prussian authorities or may depend in their success solely on support from the allied occupiers, and thus, would have the taste of treachorism. When the French occupiers erected a customs barrier between the Rhineland and the remainder of the German Empire. K. Adenauer modified the Cologne declaration to be “a last resort to save the Rhineland for Germany” in order to receive support from other political parties for the Rhenish or West German Republic (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, page 37, 1978, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5)

By mid January, German constitutional debates about the future of a republican Germany and territorial reform of the federal states and, in particular, to counter the Prussian dominance were published and
while there were suggestions to dissolve Prussia, the view that Prussia was essential to German Unity prevailed and therefore dissolution of Prussia would endanger German unity.

On 1st February 1919 K. Adenauer called upon all Rhenish delegates of the national German Assembly for a meeting in Cologne to discuss prospects and plans for a West German Republic. His suggestion aimed at avoiding annexation while giving France real security against future German aggression. But apart from the Centre Party, delegates from the other parties were not convinced of the need of a West German or Rhenish Republic and a compromise was reached by installing a West German political commission developing a plan for a West German Republic to be represented to the National German Assembly. But the compromise also included a clear call for remaining united with “our brethren in the German Empire” (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, page 53, 1978, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5).

When the government in Berlin was able to crush the left wing revolutionaries by late January 1919 the fear for a Bolshevik takeover in Germany disappeared which, in turn, weakened the Centre Party’s Rhenish ambitions. When the other parties increasingly feared a centrist domination in such a West German Republic and, in addition, doubts about Rhenish dominance appeared in the Westphalian branch of the Centre party, the protagonists of the Rhenish republic had to retreat even further. Another political meeting on 7th February in Essen ended with a condemnation of “any plan that would convulse the German Empire” (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, page 57, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5). Finally, although a centrist majority from the Rhineland still favoured a Rhenish state, strong doubts about the realization of it lead to further postponement of further steps and the local Rhineland chamber of commerce regarded the matter as “definitely been buried” (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, page 61, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5).

In the meanwhile more radical autonomists and separatist leaders grew increasingly impatient with the hesitant Centre Party under Adenauer’s leadership. The most prominent of the radical autonomists and separatists was the Bonn born lawyer Hans Adam Dorten who was elected as a representative for a variety of municipalities in the Westerwald region of the Rhineland for Adenauer’s proposed West German commission. He explained to Adenauer in January 1919 that in his opinion the decision for a West German Republic lay “solely with the inhabitants of that region, and not with the Prussian state parliament or National Assembly” (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, page 62, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5). He and his supporters demanded a plebiscite for a West German state being held as soon as possible but Adenauer hesitated and was doubtful towards any unilateral actions without the approval of the German National Assembly. Dorten and his supporters nevertheless pressed on to create the Rhenish Republic even, if necessary, with the support of the French occupiers, which lead eventually to a split with the moderates around Adenauer who brokered for a deal within the German Empire in cooperation with the new democratically minded representatives of the German Empire.

Despite Dorten having the reputation of a separatist, he himself did not advocate complete Rhenish independence from the German Empire, he viewed himself as a German federalist and declared in 1920 that he “aimed, just as the centre Party, at a Rhenish State as a federal state of the German Empire and he always supported a German Federation” (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, page 140). But in contrast to Adenauer, he was an activist who would also consider unilateral action if the Prussian or post-war German authorities appear reluctant.
In the meanwhile, the French occupying forces were considering the future of their occupied portion of the Rhineland and many favoured the creation of a Rhenish separate state associated to France as much as possible. But they realized that complete annexation was no longer pursuit because of the growing awareness that the Rhenish population did not desire being annexed by France. When becoming aware that any Rhenish state was being rejected by the German and Prussian authorities the allied Controller-General Paul Tirard decided to attempt contacting the separatists and offering them support for their cause while offering less harsh peace terms for Germany at the impending peace negotiations at Versailles. This resulted in several meetings at Aachen during March 1919 and concluded in the Aachen Punctuation proposing a Rhenish state. The French General Mangin encouraged the separatists to declare an independent Rhenish Republic instead of an autonomous federal state to which the separatist responded by promising actions by the end of May 1919. The aim was to establish a Rhenish Republic as a fait accompli in conjunction to the impending peace negotiations at Versailles in May / June 1919. The separatists around Dorten and Froberger finally met with Mangin on 17th May 1919 to discuss the situation and they agreed that if the German Empire agreed to an autonomous Rhenish Republic separated only from Prussia, France and Belgium would renounce the Saar and Eupen-Malmedy. But it soon became clear that those claiming to represent the Rhineland were rather isolated powerless figures within the Rhenish political establishment and the other allied occupying forces apart from the French wanted strict neutrality for what they considered German internal affairs. Subsequently, the American occupying forces rejected a first Rhenish Republic declaration attempt planned for Koblenz on the 25th May. When the German delegation in Versailles rejected the peace proposals including offers of less severe terms if an autonomous Rhenish buffer state would be erected, Dorten consequently attempted to proclaim unilaterally the Rhenish Republic in Wiesbaden on the 1st May 1919. With the help of the French forces he and his supporters seized public buildings and they began to seek international recognition with the expected assistance of France. The entire Rhenish delegation in the Prussian and National Assembly condemned Dorten’s “Putsch” and regarded this as a violation of the Armistice agreement. But with the other occupying powers dissociating themselves from Dorten’s action, French support also began to wane and they decided to no longer support Dorten. Subsequently by 4th of June the German authorities had re-established the administrative control in Wiesbaden and the Rhineland (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, page 103, 1978, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5).

According to Harry E. Nadler this first attempt to establish a Rhenish Republic failed due to the Rhinelanders having far greater confidence in the Berlin government than in Dorten and the lack of sympathy of the other occupying forces apart from France, namely the United Kingdom and the U.S. Eventually France valued the security given by the Anglo-American Pact of Mutual Guarantee as much more preferable than the one of an independent Rhenish Republic (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, page 117, 1978, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5). It is however, difficult to determine how strong Dorten’s support in the Rhenish general public really was. The historian Martin Schlemmer was able to prove considerable public support for Dorten’s Rhenish Republic as a federal state from individuals as well as organizations and public authorities, particularly in rural surroundings and in the southern part of the Rhineland (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, pages 128-135) but exact figures are difficult to come by. But there was also considerable resistance, in particular the urban industrial areas where large parts of the population supported the left wing uprising aiming at a socialist Germany. In addition, economic leaders with strong ties to the German Empire and the old Prussian bureaucracy condemned Rhenish separatism vigorously and also appeared prepared to suppress such moves by means of violence. It appears that only half a year after the end of WWI the population of the Rhineland was not prepared to actively support the justified demand for greater autonomy from Prussia if it meant immense trouble or even violence and settled for giving the new German Republic a chance to establish a liberal democracy even if it meant prolonged Prussian “rule”, something which also the Rhenish Centre Party eventually accepted. This was also
documented in the general elections held in 1920 were the newly established and separatist minded CVP only achieved 2.8% of the vote in the Rhine province whereas the moderate autonomous minded Centre Party achieved 41.3% (Source: http://www.gonschior.de/weimar/php/ausgabe_gebiet.php?gebiet=69).

Despite the set-back of Dorten’s failed Rhenish Republic coup from May 1919, the Rhenish movement did not disappear and had established a collective organization called the “Rheinische Volksvereinigung” (RhVV, Rhenish People’s Association), describing itself as a non-separatist federalist movement seeking for an autonomous Rhenish state within the German Empire. The “Christliche Volkspartei” (CVP, Christian People’s Party) appeared as a breakaway from the Centre Party, it is however, difficult to determine to which degree its members supported the aims of the RhVV. It appears, nevertheless, that the CVP received their best results in areas which also were strongholds of the RhVV and eventually was regarded as the political representation of the RhVV during the general German election of 1920 and Dorten’s ambitions (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, pages 143/144).

Simultaneously the “Rheinlandbund” (Rhenish Federation) was established under the leadership of the Cologne Workers- and Soldiers Council member Joseph Smeets which openly aimed at establishing an independent separate Rhenish state apart from the German Empire. The Rhenish Federation referred to the people of the Rhineland as “Rheinfranken” (Rhenanian Franks) and thus highlighted a separate identity similar to other minorities within the German Empire such as the Poles or Danes. The federation was re-organized as “Rheinisch-Republikanische Volkspartei” (RhRVP, Rhenish-Republican People’s Party) in January 1920 aiming at creating a free Rhineland by peaceful means separate from the prussified Germany and any other state, similar to the Swiss Confederation. Smeets called for a petition to convince the League of Nations (set up in 1919 on initiative of the US president Woodrow Wilson) of the existence of a separate Rhenish identity and thus to use the right of self-determination promoted by the League of Nations. The RhRVP also called for removing the Prussian bureaucracy and its representatives including expelling all Prussian “servants” and attempted to gather support from the socialistic minded Lower Rhenish industrial cities by declaring the social-democratic party as part of a re-actionary pro-Prussian plot. In Mönchengladbach about 300 copies were weekly sold of the RhRVP publication “Rheinische Republic” which shows that there was also some kind of recognition (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, pages 152-160).

The subsequent peace terms represented by the allies at Versailles were greeted with strong condemnation in Germany and regarded as unfair and very harsh but the threat that the allies may occupy even larger parts of the German Empire if the proposal was rejected by the German government forced the delegation to sign the Versailles peace treaty. One of the consequences was a revival of the German far right since they blamed the democratic parties for being weak towards the allies or even backstabbing the German army in 1918. Nevertheless, the new democratic government of the German Republic succeeded in some economic recovery in the first years of the 1920s. But hyper-inflation fuelled by the reparation payments appearing in 1923 brought renewed troubles to the economy and political unrest. In January 1923 French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr valley to ensure that reparations were paid in goods since the German currency became effectively valueless which resulted in a general strike by the workers in the Ruhr valley.

The separatist around Dorten and Smeets saw this situation as another opportunity to establish the Rhenish Republic through a coup similar to the one already attempted in 1919. The French occupying forces, however, perceived the idea as a means to use the separatist as yet another tool to force the German government to fulfil the reparation payments as demanded in the Treaty of Versailles. Collectively the separatists and the French government hoped that the population in the Rhineland and the industry would be persuaded to support a Rhenish Republic if that would mean dissociation from the economic troubles of the German Republic and political instability. This time the separatists indeed
enjoyed more popular support and on the 15th August 1923 several separatist groups lead by Dorten, Smeets, the Düsseldorf editor Friedrich Matthes and the Aachen industrialist Leo Deckers formed the “United Rhenish Movement” which aimed at the establishment of a Rhenish Republic independent from Prussia under French protection. Announcements and demonstrations were planned to gather support for their cause throughout the Rhineland (Landesarchivverwaltung Rheinland-Pfalz: Landesgeschichte im Archiv, Vor 80 Jahren - Der 23. Oktober 1923. Die Separatisten in Koblenz an der Macht, http://www.landeshauptarchiv.de/index.php?id=393 ). The movement succeeded in setting up demonstrations and the largest one took place in Düsseldorf on September, 30st where an estimated 10000 to 30000 demonstrators arrived (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, page 307, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5). But when it became obvious that some of the separatist demonstrators were armed the Prussian police interfered and dispersed the rally with a toll of 17 dead and 400 injured.

In order to support the new Rentenmark currency which was supposed to replace the de-facto valueless Reichsmark, the German government under Stresemann was considering to drop all subsidies to the Rhein-Ruhr employers and the end of all unemployment payments by the end of October 1923. The economic crisis, the apparent willingness of the German government to consider financial abandonment of the allied occupied territories and separatist agitation questioned the status of the Rhineland once again. The French and Belgian occupiers were considering scenarios in which the Rhineland would either become autonomous while remaining inside the German Empire or a complete independent state with its own international representation and currency, supported by France and Belgium. But the failure of the 1919 putsch made them hesitant and they had justified doubts if such a state would receive popular support and was able to maintain itself in the long run. In the meanwhile the separatists themselves saw the moment appropriate to step into action and free the Rhineland forever from Prussian control. The Rhenish revolution and take over was to start in Aachen on 28th October 1923 and spread from there throughout the Rhineland. But already on 21st October separatists led by Leo Deckers attempted the seizure of the Aachen City Hall and other public buildings and similar actions took place in Mönchengladbach, Düren, Jülich and Duisburg. The Belgian occupying forces first hesitated to either suppress or support the actions but pushed by the French, they finally supported the separatists in their actions. This forced the separatist in the French occupied zone to attempt similar take over’s and with the support of the French they were able to seize control which culminated into the French army disarming the German police in the Rhine province’s capital Koblenz on 24th and 25th October and the separatist under the leadership of Dorten, Matthes and Metzen declared Rhenish independence and set up a provisional government with Matthes as its Prime Minister.

But soon it became obvious that the separatists, although enjoying more public support than in 1919, were badly organized and still relied heavily on French assistance, only as long the French troops protected the separatists were they able to maintain their putsch. The French authorities intended to use the situation to as much to their advantage as possible but they soon realized that the British and Belgians were not favouring a complete independent state under a League of Nations mandate and they were fearing the repercussions this should have to the Treaty of Versailles. But with the impending end of payments and financial supply of the German government into the occupied Rhine and Ruhr territories a solution had to be found which also became obvious to the representative in the Rhenish Political Committee which was formed back in 1919 under the leadership of Adenauer. Several plans were discussed and eventually they concluded that if the Rhineland is going to be financially cut off from the rest of Germany after a new currency, the Rentenmark is introduced, it will also make sense to have some kind of political sovereignty within a German state. Further demands for internationalization of the railway network by the French lead also the Berlin government under Stresemann to consider such a Rhenish autonomy or state in order to be able to launch the new Rentenmark.
The separatist government in Koblenz however was increasingly disintegrating due to incapacity and disunity but also due to increasing resistance in the Rhenish population to accept the “Rhenish Protection Force” requisitions, which effectively degenerated into random looting. By 15th November disintegration of the separatist leadership lead to a split and the disastrous battle between separatist groups and local residents at Aegidienburg on 14th November made it clear that they were unable to gain any kind of foothold for maintaining power or finding support in the Rhenish population. With British backing, the Belgian occupying forces retreated from any protection for the separatists in their territories and the previous administration was able to re-establish itself in Aachen on 27th November, shortly afterwards Matthes declared the Rhenish government for dissolved and fled to France. Dorten tried to establish a new separatist leadership in Bad Ems which also failed and went on to support the short-lived Palatinate Republic before eventually emigrating to Nice by the end of December.

Although the separatists had failed again, the French occupiers had nevertheless achieved renewed consideration of a Rhenish autonomous state in the Rhenish moderate political leadership and industrial leadership, and the threat of recognition of the separatists enabled the French to push yet again the German authorities towards their long term goal for a buffer state, at least detached from Prussian rule (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, page 348, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5).

In the meanwhile the Rhenish Political Committee under Adenauer’s leadership now also suggested political autonomy once the Rhineland will be financially cut off and Stresemann’s government appeared willing to consider constitutional change. A Rhenish negotiating and administrative body chosen by the Reichstag and Prussian state assembly of the occupied territories was set up which attempted to maintain de-jure German and Prussian state sovereignty while “arrogating a type of de-facto provisional sovereignty” (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, page 356, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5) itself. The German government appeared incapable of preventing the French from changing the economic and political status of the Rhineland.

But by the 23rd of November, Stresemann’s government fell and the new German chancellor Marx, a Rhinelander himself, reversed Stresemann’s policies completely. He believed that the German Empire could “shoulder the economic and political burdens in the occupied territories and that there could be no consideration of any separation” (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, page 383, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5). Rhenish emergency currency would continue to circulate for a short period but no permanent Rhenish currency was to be introduced. Constitutional change could only be under the provisions of the Weimar Constitution and the Rhenish negotiating and administrative body was to refrain from any constitutional deliberations. These aims and the ambition to re-establish complete sovereignty still clashed with French ambitions who declared that they take a neutral position which also included to tolerate “free action of the Rhinelanders” and the widespread desire to end Prussian rule in the Rhineland. When Adenauer proposed a Rhenish-Westphalian state on the 6th December 1923 in order to settle the reparation problems Marx declared the proposals as not practical. He intended to recover full German sovereignty over the Rhineland and had no sympathy for any autonomous or separatist ambitions and thus tried to delay local negotiations and only permitted conclusions which could later be superseded by national decisions. Although he was a Rhinelander and a Centre politician himself he felt obliged to the Weimar constitution and solidarity for the new German Republic. He obviously hoped to win time to counter the strongest argument for autonomy “greater economic advance” by stabilizing the German economy.

With the awareness of Marx’s ambitions and the end of the separatist government in Koblenz, the French government concentrated on promoting a Rhenish or Rhenish-Westphalian federal state as the preferable
option in compare to no constitutional change by the end of December 1923. Once confronted with these suggestions, Adenauer replied that he expected the end of the occupation if such a Rhenish-Westphalian state would be established and that offers for reduced reparations would be the best argument to win over the German Parliament for such a federal state, thus basically repeating his proposals from 1919. However, Marx replied that such a state would only serve as the first step of eventual loss of German sovereignty over the Rhineland. He re-iterated that any constitutional change could only be agreed upon with the consent of Berlin and he continued to delay any concessions in the hope of an economic recovery. He also received assistance by British policy makers who believed that security in Europe could be best achieved by no further pressuring Germany towards any concessions. British doubts about French ambitions increased when they investigated the assassination of the separatist Palatinate leader Heinz in January 1924 where they found that the separatist had mainly ruled by French oppression and effective military rule and were lacking the support of the local population. By now the French economy was becoming increasingly precarious and investing efforts and finances into what seemed a lost cause appeared increasingly doubtful for the French government.

When it became apparent that also the Palatinate separatists were unable to control the region the British demanded an end of the troubles and subsequently the previous Police force was re-armed by the French and evicted the separatists from the town halls and civic buildings, often with the help of a German nationalistic mob (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, pages 401/402/406, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5). By February the 27th 1924 the Palatinate separatists dissolved themselves and thereby distinguishing this period of separatism in the Rhineland.

When it became obvious that the Rentenmark was stable and the German government was able to stabilize the economy, Adenauer’s argument for a Rhenish-Westphalian state in order to create a special economic zone became irrelevant to the industrialists and with them the Rhenish Centre party also muted their support for such a state. Chancellor Marx saw the Rhenish-Westphalian federal state simply as a vehicle to establish prolonged French influence in the Rhineland with the eventual aim to acquire the Rhineland in one form or the other and thus rejected the proposal and demanded that the status and future of the Rhineland was only to be discussed by the German and French government and not through local negotiations. With the British and Belgians unwilling to support any further territorial or constitutional change of the German Empire and the increasing French economic weakness while the German economy recovered, autonomy for the Rhineland appeared suddenly unattractive, which meant a loss of momentum for the movement from which it never recovered.

The German government now offered the French increased security guaranteed through the development of economic and commercial relations and Stresemann stated that there was no need to establish a Rhenish state because the Treaty of Versailles created more than ample security for France. He regarded Adenauer’s Rhenish-Westphalian state as “preposterous” and “could only discourage foreign investment in the new Rentenmark” (Harry E. Nadler, Thesis (Ph. D.): The Rhenish Separatist Movements during the early Weimar Republic 1918-1924, New York University, 1978, page 412, ISBN 0-8240-8050-5). Now even the Rhenish Centre Party called for intergovernmental French-German rather than local negotiations about the future status of the Rhineland.

Faced with the Marx’s government rejection of any federal state proposals and the French rejection of their reparation plan, Adenauer and his group gave up on further negotiations and the autonomy movement was effectively dead by the end of February 1924. Marx’s economic success and the ability to internationalize the reparation problems lead the Centre party to believe that Rhenish interests are better served by Berlin than anywhere else.
Once the ambitions for any kind of autonomous Rhenish state failed the momentum for a Rhenish state, in which form ever, appeared to have been lost at least for the moment. Attempts to maintain or resurrect the movement were made by e.g. Benedikt Schmittman (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, page 738) but it appeared that the Rhinelanders had resigned to the fate that they remain a province of the Prussian state inside the German Empire once again.

Then, in 1933 the Nazi-Party took power in the German Empire and as is well known, established one of the most extreme nationalist, racist and xenophobic regimes which wiped out all liberties and democracy and also suppressed and eliminated any regionalist tendencies in the Rhineland until their downfall in May 1945.

8.6. Reasons for failure and disputes concerning the Rhenish separatist and autonomous movements

The Lower Rhine, although not always at the centre of the Rhenish separatist and autonomist movement, nevertheless was affected and participated in the attempts to achieve a Rhenish state, whether as a federal state or a complete independent state. But enthusiasm notably faded in the northern most parts of the Lower Rhine which was also described as such by the historian Martin Schlemmer. Schlemmer attributed this to a growing cultural dissociation with Cologne and a change of economic and cultural outlook, in particular when the Lower Rhenish industrial cities effectively became a part of the Rhenish-Westphalian industrial conglomeration. Railway lines were built to connect the Lower Rhine and the Westphalian industrial centres with the harbours of the Netherlands and Belgium rather than with Cologne and the southern parts of the Rhineland. He also attributes this dissociation from Cologne to a cultural difference reflected by the linguistic “Uerdingen” divide line which effectively associates the Franconian dialects spoken north of this line to Dutch (see also chapter 10.3). Schlemmer, however, views this as a sign for orientation towards Münster and Westphalia (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, page 505) but the historic events as well as the linguistic orientation of the Lower Rhine as described in the previous chapters do not support this view. The alternative orientation of the Lower Rhine was always towards the Netherlands, Münster never played a role. Thus the Rhenish movement clashed in the Northern Lower Rhine with a Nederlandic attitude and sentiment which could explain the more muted support for the Rhenish case. The Centre Party was almost as strong in the northern Lower Rhine as was the case further south and also the CVP performed almost as good in the rural district of Geldern as it did further south in the general election of 1920 (see below), thus, anti-Prussian feelings existed just as much as further south but the self-perception was strongly influenced by the Netherlands. This would not come as a big surprise considering the use of Dutch as an official language in the area until the 1840s and the original participation in the Dutch-Netherlandic culture. The separation of the Cleves-Gelder area from the Netherlands only appeared in its full extend after the Vienna congress in 1815 and the fact that the catholic majority of the area was then ruled by protestant Prussia helped retaining a separate identity somewhere halfway between the linguistic-cultural connection to the Netherlands and a catholic connection to the Dutch and Belgian provinces Limburg on the one hand and the areas further south in the Rhineland on the other. Although the Uerdingen linguistic divide has the character of a cultural divide it also has to be noted that the transition is fluid, Dutch sentiments can also be encountered south of the Uerdingen line.

From a political agenda the issue of Rhenish autonomy or even independence had failed due to the following circumstances:
1. Lack of popular support to struggle for a Rhenish state despite its initial popularity. The Rhenish Centre Party, which was the largest political party in the Rhineland, initially supported and reflected this popularity but when resistance appeared from the post-war Prussian authorities and the new democratically minded German government, the leaders of the Centre Party refrained from unilateral action. This was then attempted by Dorten and his supporters in 1919 and again in 1923 but although he received support from rural-catholic areas (Martin Schlemmer: Los von Berlin. Die Rheinstaatsbestrebungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Bohlau Verlag, Köln, ISBN 978-3-412-11106-9, page 735), the population was not prepared to struggle for it in particular when this struggle turned violent in 1923. The general public obviously preferred calm and stability after the turmoil of WWI and eventually the new German Republic appeared increasingly able to guarantee this. With a German Republic achieved and full democracy in the German Empire and the Prussian state parliament, liberal minded Rhinelanders including Centre party supporters obviously wanted to give this Republic a fair chance and where reluctant to make life more difficult than necessary for the democratically elected governments.

2. The French interference and support for the Rhenish movement was viewed with suspicion and appeared as directed only to the gain of French interests. In this context the French interference probably harmed the autonomist and separatist movement more than anything else and made the autonomists and separatist leaders vulnerable to accusations of treason, which was not true looking at the ambitions and aims of the various autonomous and separatist organisations.

3. The British and Belgian occupiers of the Rhineland preferred a stable Germany and also viewed the Treaty of Versailles as more than sufficient to guarantee security in Europe against possible future German ambitions. They believed Rhenish autonomy would lead to further bitterness about the allied ambitions and could have severe consequences in the German population in the future. Whether this was justified assumption is questionable since, despite their opposition for a Rhenish state, the extreme right-wing Nazi-Party came to power nevertheless only a decade later. In this context the refusal to lend support for the Rhenish Republic by the British occupiers can almost be seen as the beginning of the appeasement policy which culminated in the destruction of Czechoslovakia by Nazi-Germany in 1938. This experience may have influenced the British when they created the very Rhenish-Westphalian federal state in the form of Northrhine-Westphalia after WWII while many of the initial indigenous proponents had already resigned long ago and given up on the idea (see chapter 9.1.).

Other resources also name increasing support for German nationalistic ambitions as a reason for failure but that appears disputable. German nationalistic groups rejecting vigorously any kind of separatism existed in the Rhineland, including the left bank of the Rhine as an incident reported from the city of Rheydt shows, where a certain Josef Buesgen, who expressed his support for the Rhenish separatist movement in his barber shop found that his windows were smashed the next morning and graffiti was placed on his shop saying “Traitor, Dorten pig”. (Wolfgang Löhr: Mönchengladbacher Stadtgeschichte, Band 3.1, Rheinland-Verlag GmbH, Cologne, 2003, ISBN 978-3-87448-265-3, page 289). But this appears an isolated incident because Schlemmer was able to demonstrate considerable public support for Dorten’s Rhenish Republic, at least as a federal German state, in particular in the southern part of the Rhineland. In the German general election of 1920 German nationalistic parties also appear less popular than Rhenish separatist minded parties: The Rhenish separatist CVP, despite a low share of votes, had nevertheless more support than the German nationalistic DNVP, at least on the left bank of the Rhine (see below).

The German historian Henning Köhler’s claimed in “Adenauer und die Rheinische Republik” that “in 1918/1919 there was nobody (in the Rhineland) who publicly declared to leave the German Empire” (Henning Köhler: Adenauer und die Rheinische Republik, Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986, page 14, ISBN 3-531-11765-3) but as Martin Schlemmer pointed out, the declaration of the Rhenish

But in general, a certain indifference among the Rhenish population towards national or ethnic issues after WWI can be noted which may very well be due to the hardship experienced during WWI. Looking at the Rhenish population in Eupen-Malmedy it appears that just as the Rhinelanders in Prussia preferred non-violence and stability after WWI, the Rhinelanders in Eupen-Malmedy also preferred non-violence and stability but here they obviously accepted Belgium as the state who could offer that and the majority would then become loyal towards this state. The general Belgian election results of 1939 in Eupen-Malmedy show that even at the height of Hitler’s popularity the majority of the inhabitants voted for Belgian parties and thus accepted Belgian sovereignty and obviously preferred it to Nazi-Germany. In his well documented investigation about the sociological aspects of the integration of the new Belgian territories after WWI, Raphael Timmermann can demonstrate that despite vigorous attempts by the national socialistic orientated “Heimatfreunde Front” in the Eupen-Malmedy district the German nationalists were unable to convince the majority of the population to vote for them since the majority (54%) voted for the pro-Belgian parties and thus accepted the transfer to Belgium of the territory after WWI (Raphael Timmermann: Zur nationalen Integration fremdnationaler ethnischen Minderheiten und ihren sozialpolitischen Konsequenzen, dargestellt am Beispiel der deutschsprachigen gesellschaftlichen Gruppen Eupen-Malmedy zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen, Frankfurt, 1989, ISBN 3-631-41619-9, page 247). Timmermann attributes pro-Belgian support to the Nazi-critical position of the Catholic Church in Eupen-Malmedy but also contact to Jewish emigrants from Germany and relatives living in Germany reporting atrocities as decisive factors for the fact that the majority voted pro-Belgian in 1939.

However, Timmermann does not mention that this is in line with developments on the left bank of the Rhine inside the German Empire in that period as well. Here, it is remarkable that the NSdAP was never able to gain the majority of votes in the Rhine province itself apart from the disputed March 1933 elections when they officially had a larger share of the vote than the Centre Party due to gains in the large industrial cities in the Düsseldorf district. This confirms the unenthusiastic Rhenish attitude towards German nationalism in comparison to other parts of Germany. Already the first elections held after WWI show a clear picture. The election result from the 1920 general German election show that in the rural Lower Rhine districts on the left bank such as Geldern (8.0), Gladbach (2.8%) or Neuss (1.9%) the separatist CVP could gain more votes than the German nationalistic DNVP (respectively 2.3%, 2.4%, 0.7%). In all districts the centre party was by far the largest with between 60% up to 75% of the vote (Source: http://www.gonschior.de/weimar/php/ausgabe_gebiet.php?gebiet=69). On the right bank of the Rhine the results were substantially different, in rural districts such as Waldbröl or Mettmann the DNVP was much larger than the CVP, in fact the CVP was negligible. In Waldbröl the DNVP was even recorded as the largest party with 34.3% of the vote surpassing the Centre Party with only 31.7%. This shows that national feelings differed tremendously between the left and the right bank of the Rhine, 20 years of French-Napoleonic rule on the left bank obviously left their mark.

8.7. Election results in detail
During the first general German election in 1920 the Centre Party received 41% of the vote in compare to 2.8% for the separatist CVP in the Rhineprovince. The Election results also show that the separatist minded CVP only achieved some support in rural Lower Rhine areas but never received any substantial support in the larger cities:

8.2% District of Geldern
5.6% District of Krefeld
2.9% District of Grevenbroich
2.8% District of Mönchengladbach
1.9% District of Neuss
In contrast to:
0.16% City of Krefeld
0.8% City of Mönchengladbach
However, the CVP achieved 3.7% in the City of Cologne which shows some kind of following there.

But all this shows that the CVP was never a mass movement at the Lower Rhine. As already mentioned above, the Centre Party clearly remained the largest party until November 1932 in the Rhineprovince, only the doubtful last election of March 1933 recorded the NSdAP as the largest party. In the district of Geldern the Centre Party achieved results of up 75% of the vote at general elections, even in March 1933 they received 50% of the vote thus clearly beating the NSdAP. In the district of Grevenbroich-Neuss the Centre Party also was able to remain the largest party with a share of 40% of the vote still in March 1933 (Source: http://www.gonschior.de/weimar/php/ausgabe_gebiet.php?gebiet=69).

The results here show that the Lower Rhine, just like the remaining catholic dominated areas of the Rhineland supported and trusted above all the catholic and Rhenish based Centre Party and German nationalism, although strong by the beginning of the 1930 in the form of the NSdAP, never formed a majority in the Rhineland, including the Lower Rhine. But it also shows that there is no division between the Dutch speaking areas around Geldern and Cleves and the more middle-German Ripuarian speaking areas around Cologne and further south towards Koblenz and Trier. In the political programs of the Centre Party and the separatist groups it appears that Dutch language and/or Lower Franconian in the Lower Rhine never played a part or became an argument for their separatism. Separatism and autonomist claims were based on regional Rhenish feelings and anti-Prussian, catholic and also liberal attitudes inherited from the era of enlightenment and the subsequent 20 years of French rule. The awareness of Lower Franconian being effectively Dutch always existed but was never formulated into political demands. It is remarkable that in Limburg and Eupen-Malmedy a similar political pattern existed and still exists; here, as in the Rhineland, catholic-social democratically minded parties dominate and usually become the largest local party / parties. Therefore, despite international borders, a common character and mentality appears to remain in either the Lower Rhine, Limburg or Eupen-Malmedy and that was also confirmed by the German cultural researcher Rüdiger Haude’s ability to demonstrate that the population of the Selfkant area in the Lower Rhine remained relatively indifferent about living in a German, Netherlandic or Belgian state after the territory was temporarily transferred from the German Rhineprovince to the Netherlands after WWII.
8.8. Conclusion

Ever since the period of French rule in the Rhineland the ideas of liberalism, justice, economic freedom and accountability could not be extinguished anymore. When Belgium rose and succeeded to split from the undemocratic and protestant dominated Netherlandic Kingdom many Rhinelanders looked enviously to the West and dreamed of something similar for the Rhineland. There were hopes in 1848 that a German state could achieve these ideas and were revived once the German (Weimar) Republic was established in 1918 but separatism, even if it only called for separating from Prussia and autonomy inside a German state was viewed with suspicion and decried as treacherous, however, all dreams and ideas ended for good in the Nazi dictatorship. Only when the allies after the defeat of the Nazis decided that something substantial had to change and, in contrast to 1918, were convinced that the German Empire and Prussia had to be dismantled, a new form of state was built from scratch and the old dream of a liberal-democratic Rhenish state in the form of Northrhine-Westphalia fell to the Rhinelanders in 1946. Together with the other Rhenish state Rhineland-Palatinate both became a part of the western orientated Federal Republic of Germany which was also often viewed as an “extended Rhenish Republic” symbolized by selecting the Rhenish city of Bonn as its capital.

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