

Dear Mateja Demsar,

Since December 2014, you are the new project officer in charge for my Marie Curie-project 329841 (PriPar) on early modern private partnerships and company law in the Meuse-Rhine region (Aachen, Liège, Maastricht). So, I contact you as regards the following.

Basically, the project's deliverables consisted of five articles and one symposium. Three articles were supposed to deal with the historical development of private partnerships and company law in the respective cities of Maastricht, Liège and Aachen. In so doing, the research was based on the notarial protocol books preserved in the respective city archives. The other two articles were to interpret these results (on Aachen, Liège and Maastricht) in light of two major historical debates: one on the existence of a so-called *lex mercatoria*; the other on the origins of mercantile capitalism.

Until recently, the research project has been executed successfully and according to plan. As regards the cities of Maastricht and Liège, all the archival research has been executed while resulting in two separate articles on early modern private partnerships in these cities. Some time ago, however, I ran into an obstacle I could not have foreseen. Despite indications in the existing literature confirming the survival of abundant notarial archives in the *Aachener Stadtarchiv*, I was told by the personnel of the latter, more specifically Miss Angelika Pauels, the archivist in charge of the notarial protocol books, that these notarial registers could not be consulted for the time being, since they have not been inventoried yet and because of the poor material condition that they are currently in. In case further evidence is required which confirms these statements officially, Miss Pauels has expressed her willingness to write an official letter in which she states the inaccessibility of the notarial archives in Aachen.

From a scientific point of view, however, the aforementioned hurdle did not necessarily impede the answering of the remaining research objectives of my research project. After all, it was still possible to interpret the results regarding the cities of Liège and Maastricht in light of the historical debates on the *lex mercatoria* and the emergence of merchant capitalism in the early modern Meuse-Rhine region. Nevertheless, these interpretations may have compromised lightly from an argumentative as well as comparative point of view (2 cities instead of 3), because of the absence of the archival material on Aachen. Therefore, and while awaiting the final outcome of the Aachen accessibility issue, I decided to re-establish the comparative and argumentative strength of these interpretations/articles by means of extra research activities in the Antwerp notarial archives. The reasons to opt for a city like Antwerp are twofold. On the one hand, Antwerp was -besides Amsterdam- the most important mercantile centre in the early modern Netherlands of which an abundant amount of notarial archives are still being preserved and accessible. On the other hand, the Meuse-Rhine region itself did not offer equivalent alternative opportunities to replace Aachen, due

to the absence of equally important (mercantile) cities of a comparable size. (Of course, there is Cologne, but here the notarial archives are still not accessible after the unfortunate collapse of the archives in February 2010.)

Finally, I would like to stress that, despite the inaccessibility of the Aachen archives, the preconceived deliverables of the project have never been at risk. The planned symposium will take place in Maastricht on the 30th and 31st of March 2015, and the articles on Liège, Maastricht, the *lex mercatoria* and the origin of mercantile capitalism have been published already or still await publication. In addition, three extra articles are still 'under review' by the reviewers of the respective journals they are to be published in.

So, since I don't know whether these events require special administrative measures or formalities as regards my project, I was advised by Miss Diana Schabergs, our contact person for this project who is in the CC of this email, to contact and inform you about these unforeseen circumstances regarding the project and its final outcome.

Best regards,

Bram Van Hofstraeten