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**BELGIUM.**

*HL Deb 26 January 1832 vol 9 cc834-91* [834](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_834%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20834%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c834)

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_14%22%20%5Co%20%22Link%20to%20this%20speech%20by%20Mr%20George%20Hamilton-Gordon) [*The Earl of Aberdeen*](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-george-hamilton-gordon-3)

My Lords; I am quite aware that, in the course which I am about to follow this night, I may be accused of attempting to pursue a singular path. I am ready to admit, that to the King alone it belongs, in the exercise of his undoubted prerogative, to contract alliances, to frame treaties, and to negociate on all matters with the governments of foreign States, and no man can be less desirous than I am, to question or limit that prerogative. But, my Lords, it is also true that, in particular cases, the Parliament of this country has interfered, and [835](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_835%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20835%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c835) circumstances have arisen under which it has not hesitated to question the exercise of a prerogative for the due use of which the Ministers of the Crown are responsible. My Lords, it is not unprecedented in the history of this country that the Sovereign has come down to ask the advice of Parliament, while negotiations were pending, as to the proper course to be adopted; and Parliament has also, unsolicited, at other times carried to the foot of the Throne its humble advice as to the character and conduct of negotiations. Not to keep you in suspense as to precedents, your Lordships must recollect that remarkable instance to-wards the close of the 17th century, when Parliament, in a situation not dissimilar from the present, attempted, in the reign of Charles 2nd, to detach that Monarch from his unnatural connexion with France, and recommended to him in lieu thereof to form an alliance more creditable to his character and to the honour and interest of the country, by cultivating a closer and more cordial intimacy with the Dutch nation. A similar course had been pursued by Parliament on other occasions. It is true, my Lords, that, in the conduct of negotiations of this nature, respect is generally observed to that secresy which is necessary for the successful completion of such transactions. In general, the public know nothing of treaties and conventions until they are concluded, and formally and officially laid upon the Table of the House. I freely confess that, if I only knew that his Majesty was engaged in a negotiation with other Powers, having in view the object which has been stated—namely, the settling the affairs of Belgium and Holland, however little I might feel disposed to trust the views of his Majesty's present Ministers, or however little I might be disposed to place confidence in their exertions to bring the matter to an issue which, to me, would appear advantageous to the country, I should certainly be contented to wait until I saw the treaty laid on the Table, and then, if I thought proper, I would exercise the power which belongs to me as a Member of this House, and would proceed to censure, when advice was no longer of use. But, my Lords, the case at present is materially different. His Majesty informed us, in the Speech at the opening of the Session, that he had concluded a treaty with the king of Belgium, which would be laid upon the Table of the House as soon as the ratifications were exchanged. I must take the present opportunity of observing, that [836](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_836%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20836%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c836) this is a most irregular, and, I believe, an unprecedented course. I never recollect to have heard before of a treaty being announced from the Throne until the ratifications were actually exchanged, and Ministers were prepared to lay it on the Table of the House. This deviation from the established practice may obviously place the country in a situation of very great difficulty. There is no sovereign that gives to his Ministers a power to treat with other nations who does not reserve to himself the right to ratify such treaties or not;—and it is unquestionably not only disrespectful to the Sovereign with whom we treat, to announce the negotiation to the British Parliament under such circumstances, but such premature disclosures may produce results extremely embarrassing to the country. I feel it more necessary to allude to this circumstance, because if I am not much mistaken, the noble Lords opposite have carried the practice which I feel it my duty thus to reprehend still further. With respect to another treaty, which was the subject of conversation in this House the day before yesterday, his Majesty announced, not only that he had concluded the treaty, but that he had directed it to be laid on the Table of the House. This treaty was dated the 30th of November, and his Majesty's Speech was delivered on the 6th of December. It is quite clear, therefore, that the ratifications could not have been exchanged when this announcement was made in the Speech. Is is impossible that they should have been received from Paris at the time, and a noble Viscount opposite has, in fact, stated, that they were received on some day in the middle of December. My Lords, these are not mere forms. Depend upon it that if the usual course be departed from, it may give rise to material inconvenience. I can only answer for the practice of the Administration with which I was connected. So strongly did I myself feel this conviction, that, when I had the honour to fill the office of his Majesty's Secretary of State, I recollect that I signed a treaty with the Austrian Plenipotentiaries, which treaty was in my possession, and although the Government of which I formed a part had good reason to believe that the ratifications had left Vienna, and were on the road to London; still, because they had not been received, I and my colleagues felt it our duty not to announce the treaty in the Speech from the Throne until we were in a condition to lay it before the House. With this notice of the course pursued by [837](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_837%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20837%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c837) his Majesty's Ministers, I have also to advert to an act of the king of the Belgians. That prince has communicated the treaty to which I have alluded to the Chamber of Deputies at Brussels. What power the constitution of Belgium gives him on the subject I do not know. I presume that, if the constitution gives the king any power, it gives him that which is essential to a sovereign—the power of negotiating treaties; but what particular prerogatives it confers I am not prepared to say. I ought, perhaps, to apologize for not being better informed of the nature of the Belgian constitution. But the consequence of the communication I have mentioned is, that we have the treaty authentically, if not officially, before us. Seeing in this treaty provisions which seem injurious to the interests of this country, and highly detrimental to the honour of the King, what course is a Member of Parliament bound to pursue? Is not this the time, when the treaty is brought to our knowledge, and when some of the parties concerned in it appear reluctant to consummate their own act of injustice—is it not now, if ever, the time for Parliament to express an opinion, while an opinion may possibly be of service? I shall hereafter explain the provisions of the treaty to which I more particularly refer; but I now feel myself under the necessity of declaring, that it is impossible for me to conceive how we can discharge our duty to ourselves, to the country, and to the King, if we do not express our opinion at this moment. Having stated the impression which the knowledge of the treaty has produced in my mind, I will act with corresponding sincerity. I look for no papers which have been published over and over again, and commented upon by every newspaper in town—I will not propound any truisms which it might be difficult, to deny—I will employ no parliamentary tactics in order to carry my point; but what I feel strongly I will express honestly, and will call upon this House to declare its opinion by an Address to the Throne, such as I think the importance of the case demands. His Majesty said, in his Speech from the Throne, that he trusted the period was not far distant when the king of the Netherlands would see the necessity of acceding to the arrangement made by the Five Powers; but on the motion for an Address to the Crown, I took the opportunity of stating, not only that I doubted that such would be the case, but that I should [838](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_838%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20838%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c838) be much surprised if a sovereign so circumstanced could assent to such an arrangement, not only because that which was proposed was unjust and detrimental to his interest, but in truth, even if he were inclined to agree, it would be impossible for him to act in such opposition to the unanimous feelings of his people. The noble Earl opposite thought otherwise. He is now better informed. He has now seen what the united efforts of a loyal and patriotic people are capable of performing. He has found that enthusiasm, energy, and zeal are not always the characteristics of a revolutionary party. He has seen a constitutional king supported by a free people, and I think it impossible that he should have seen it without being inspired with respect and admiration. I fear, however, that it is not difficult to perceive that that necessity which the noble Lords opposite made his Majesty say he relied upon, as likely to bring his ally to agree to the arrangement, furnishes a key to the honesty of the noble Earl, and affords an index to the feelings in which the negotiation was curried on. His Majesty was not advised to say that he hoped his ally would see the wisdom, or the policy, or the justice, or the expediency of conforming to the arrangement; but that he would see the necessity. I think, my Lords, that the spectacle presented by the conduct of the Dutch government, supported as it has been by the people of Holland, demands the highest applause. The king has conducted himself with a degree of resolution, of prudence, and of consistency, above all praise: and, if it please Almighty God, I trust his merits will meet with due success. In truth, the cause of Holland is so just a cause, so good a cause that it must prosper and when I say the cause of Holland, I entreat your Lordships to believe that I mean the cause of England too, for I consider them inseparable and identical. I felt so convinced that this cause must sooner or later, receive the success which it deserved, that I declare it was not without a mixture of regret that I was informed of the apparent support which the Dutch government received by the reluctance of Russia and Prussia to countenance anything prejudicial to its rights. I give those Powers full credit for the generous motives which have actuated them; but I regret that they are liable to misconstruction. I regret to see the Emperor of Russia the protector of Holland. I regret to see him occupy the place which I had hoped belonged to England. I felt it would be [839](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_839%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20839%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c839) said, that the resistance opposed by Holland to that necessity, which appeared to his Majesty's Ministers so inevitable, must have received the secret encouragement of other courts. There can be nothing more untrue than that allegation; and, if your Lordships will but reflect for a moment, you will see that it cannot be true. If you recollect the constitution of Holland, you will at once see how utterly useless encouragement would be for such purposes. My Lords, I should like to know what encouragement could enable the king of the Netherlands to raise the supplies necessary to carry on the difficult transactions in which he is engaged. He can only depend upon the support of a united people, and it is not Russian encouragement which can produce unanimity in Holland, or force money out of the pockets of the Dutch. Your Lordships well know what difficulties that country laboured under. Perhaps no country in Europe has such financial difficulties to struggle with as Holland; and yet, notwithstanding this, the States-General have almost unanimously granted to the King an extraordinary supply of not less than four millions sterling, to enable him to meet the emergencies of the moment. I should like to know how far the encouragement of Russia was instrumental to that grant. This is not a case where a State contracts a loan upon ruinous terms from a foreign capitalist; but it is the case of a king of a free people receiving a vote from a free assembly of his free subjects. Therefore I say, that their unanimity is without question. Look, then, at their military exertions. See a population of about two millions having not much less than 100,000 men under arms—this force being composed almost entirely of militia, volunteers, burghers—leaving their occupations and their trades to take up arms in the difficult crisis of their country's affairs. I say, my Lords, that no foreign encouragement could produce such effects as these. It is impossible to conceive that that whole country does not feel as one man. Taking it then for granted that the Dutch nation has displayed a zeal and unanimity which it is impossible to excel, I may be permitted to express a hope, that the Dutch government will not abuse the enthusiasm and energy which the people have manifested. I trust that the wisdom and prudence of the king will not permit him to take advantage of the confidence and patriotism which has shone forth; and as all Europe must have admired his constancy and firmness, I trust [840](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_840%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20840%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c840) we shall have equal reason to admire his moderation and his prudence; and that he will not be tempted to press for unreasonable terms in consequence of the support which must be so gratifying to him. Before I come to the provisions of the treaty, I wish to be permitted to engage your Lordships' attention whilst I take a cursory view of the course which has been followed in the negotiations. It is essential to the case to recollect, that at the Peace of Paris, in 1814, it was determined to constitute the kingdom of the Netherlands. It was declared that Holland was placed under the sovereignty of the House of Orange, which was to receive in addition the Belgic territory; but the Allies, who had made the conquest of the Belgian provinces, thought proper to annex conditions to the delivery of those provinces. Now, undoubtedly, they were perfect masters of Belgium, and had it completely at their disposal. There would not have been any injustice in restoring it to the dominion of the House of Austria. It might have been disposed of, as was at one time advised by Mr. Pitt, in a note which was laid before this House. It might have been added to the Prussian dominions, as it had not, at least for three or four centuries, been an independent country. But the Allies consulted the happiness and prosperity of those provinces more effectually by uniting them with a free and constitutional government, under which they might enjoy the blessings of a free constitution, and all the advantages of liberty. This was followed by a treaty in the same year, in which certain terms were proposed to the king of the Netherlands, and accepted by him, as the fundamental law of the union; and this was annexed to the general treaty at the Congress of Vienna, and acceded to by every Power in Europe. The kingdom being thus constituted, the first question that arises is, has the king of the Netherlands observed the treaty as contained in those articles. I defy any man, in any place, to deny, that the king of the Netherlands has strictly and conscientiously fulfilled every tittle of it. He has conformed in every respect to that which was made the fundamental law of the union of his dominions; and the general course of his government has been such as to extort from all mankind, and even from the noble Lords opposite, the tribute of their admiration. I very well recollect the noble Baron (Lord Holland) who, some six or seven years ago, sitting, at that time, on this (the Opposition) [841](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_841%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20841%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c841) side of the House, when indulging in some of those invectives, which he was not unaccustomed to throw out respecting the sovereigns of Europe in general—Irecollect that, when in full course, he checked himself in the midst of his career, and said, "No; there is one exception—the king of the Netherlands; he loves freedom, and governs in such a manner as to afford a praise worthy example to the other sovereigns of Europe." But, unfortunately, two or three years ago, the king of the Netherlands found it necessary to prosecute the editors of some seditious newspapers, and since then he has lost the support of many of his liberal friends throughout Europe. But I say that he has not only strictly observed the treaty upon which the union of the provinces was founded, but that his strict observance of the treaty was the cause of his losing his territory. The first discontent grew out of the article which prescribes a strict equality between persons of all religious persuasions. No doubt some of the bigoted Catholic party took advantage of this to form a union with some of the most opposite parties. The government might have despised these combinations, but after the French revolution broke out, and the impulse was received from France, the revolution at Brussels took place. I think it impossible for your Lordships to doubt, that if the king of the Netherlands had possessed a corps of 20,000 Dutch troops, that revolution would never had made any progress. But the treaty, by insisting upon a complete amalgamation of the troops, prevented his having a separate corps. Every regiment was composed of Dutch and Belgians, and from the preponderance of the population, nearly two-thirds were Belgians. The effect of this was, that every corps of the mililia was completely disorganised from the beginning, and, in consequence, there was not a single body of men who could act in any military capacity. I, therefore, infer, that the absence of a corps of faithful troops, however small, was the cause of the spread of the revolution. This is the more apparent, from the total want of any reason being ever given for the occurrence of such a revolt. That a momentary revolt may take place in any country, I admit to be very possible, but so senseless, so unintelligible a revolution as that which has been accomplished by the Belgians, the history of the world does not record; and this is so true, that, up to the present hour, no official statement—no manifesto—no reason has been assigned. [842](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_842%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20842%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c842) No detail has been promulgated of the grievances under which the people laboured, of the tyranny which could no longer be endured. So far is this from being the case, that, if I am not mistaken, since the revolution, the leading people have repeatedly met, thinking it right to publish to the world some statement of their case, but it has always been abandoned as hopeless. We are still left, therefore, to speculate upon the causes of the revolution. But the revolution having taken place, the king of the Netherlands, situated as he was, did that which it was undoubtedly his duty to do. He called the States together in the northern and southern provinces, and consulted with them upon the course to be taken in the existing state of affairs. The first grievance was an obnoxious minister, who had already been removed, and a local tax with which the government had nothing to do. But the demands soon rose, and a separation of the provinces was pronounced indispensable. That wish was shared by the Dutch as strongly as by the Belgians. The king, finding it impossible to act in execution of the treaty, naturally called upon the allies, who had imposed the treaty upon him, to concert measures by which a remedy could best be found to repair the evils and injuries to their own work, as well as to the safety of his dominions. Under these circumstances the Conference of London was held. The first object which was held in view, was to establish a cessation of hostilities. That, too, was its first act; and as it was the last act done during my connection with the Administration, I think it right to explain it. I signed the documents the day after I had resigned the seals of office, in consequence of the importance of the object in view, and I should not have taken upon myself to do so under any other circumstances. But I thought, as I was responsible for that department of the public affairs, I could not suffer the country to be involved in the danger of hostilities, if it was in my power, by any act, though not strictly official, to prevent it. That paper was signed on the 17th of November, and it ends our share in the transactions. I must beg leave to take this opportunity of contradicting a declaration made by the noble Earl opposite, that he found the separation of Holland and Belgium effected; that we had accomplished it. I have told your Lordships the only acts which were done during our connection with the Administration. In fact, no question occurred [843](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_843%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20843%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c843) about the separation, except, indeed, that the noble Earl appears more than once to have confounded the separation of Belgium with its independence. But, my Lords, these are two very different things. That an administrative separation was necessary I admit, because it was desired as much by the one party as by the other; but the noble Earl will admit that, about the same time that he and his friends came into office, they found a congenial Ministry in France. About the same time M. Lafitte and General Sebastiani came into the exercise of power in France, and, in conjunction with the French Administration, the independence of Belgium was resolved upon. So much is this the case, that whatever advantages France may have received from the arrangements, I must do the French government the justice to declare, that I have no vestige of a communication from them relative to the independence of Belgium. So long as the Conference was conducted under the Administration of my noble friend near me (the Duke of Wellington) we, in conformity with strict integrity, and with a proper regard for the interests of all, consulted with the Plenipotentiaries of the different Powers, but the noble Lords opposite, instead of following this example, thought proper, in the absence of the Minister of the ting of the Netherlands, to come to a resolution for establishing the independence of Belgium. Against this decision, contained in the protocol of the 20th of December, the Minister of the Netherlands protested in these words:—'The undersigned feels it a duty which he owes to his sovereign, the king of the Netherlands, to protest solemnly, as he does under this present note, against the protocol issued by the commissioners of the Five Powers, on the 20th of December, inasmuch as by its provisions, this act of the Conference attacks the rights of the king of the Netherlands; and he also solemnly protests against all the consequences which may be drawn from those acts of the Five Powers, to the prejudice of the existing treaty, and to the prejudice of all other the rights of his august sovereign.' The king himself also protested against it for the same reasons. His Majesty says, 'If the Treaty of Paris, of 1814, placed Belgium at the disposal of the allied Sovereigns, this power, when they had fixed the fate of Belgium, was then renounced according to the law of nations, and that they were returning upon their own work by these further proceedings, [844](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_844%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20844%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c844) and that the decision to which the Five Powers had come to, for severing Belgium from the House of Nassau, was beyond the sphere of their power.' The Conference of London, it is true, was assembled at the desire of the king of the Netherlands, but this circumstance did not vest in the Conference the power to declare by its protocol that which was contrary to the very object for which they were invited to assemble, nor did it give them the authority, instead of advising for the interest of the king, and for the preservation of his sovereignty, to accomplish the dismemberment of his kingdom. And yet, by this protocol, the Conference assumed to themselves such a power, and the independence was thereby virtually decided upon by them as early as I have stated. I may here take notice of an argument which has been advanced by the Conference in the document last issued by them, and which is dated the 4th of this present month; they say, When the king agreed to the treaty by which his dominions were confined to Holland, he had no right to be heard at the Conference upon that subject, as he had, by so agreeing to that separation, deprived himself of that advantage.' I think that nothing can be more unjust, or indeed I will say more disingenuous, than this remark. What was the king to do? The treaty imposed obligations upon him, and it also conferred rights. But he was bound, before he came to the allies for assistance, to repair and modify their work, in order to obtain the object they had in view; he was bound to ascertain the sense of his people. He did accordingly call the States-General together, and when there was a unanimous decision in favour of separation, the king always referred to the allies, as the parties who must ultimately pronounce upon the question, as they were interested in it in the same manner as he himself was. To say, therefore, that he deprived himself of the power of calling upon the allies, when he did what was necessary to put it in his power to do so, is so unjust, that I am astonished that it should have found a place in a composition so ingenious in many respects, but, at the same time, so fallacious in various particulars. The separation proposed by the States-General, and not sanctioned, be it observed, by the king, for no royal answer has been returned to that proposition, for the separation sanctioned by the king, had only reference to the administrative separation, which might have been established in. 1814. The provinces might then have been [845](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_845%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20845%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c845) united, though with a different administration for each, instead of that complete and uniform amalgamation, which was then adopted by the allies. The Conference appears to me to have proceeded upon an erroneous principle, and to have thought, because the Belgian provinces were once at the disposal of the allies, that for all time to come they had full authority to dispose of them in any way they pleased. This, my Lords, is the most monstrous proposition that can be advanced; it is, nevertheless, that which is maintained in the very protocol in which the Conference declare the separation and independence of Belgium. They state, that they have determined upon what they consider to be for the prosperity of the people of both countries, and the peace of Europe; and that, in fact, the arrangement is made for an European object. But they forget, that when they imposed the obligation of that treaty on the king of the Netherlands, they at the same time gave him the rights which that treaty conferred, and that he could only be lawfully divested of those rights by negotiation with himself, as the king; and that, without his consent, neither this, nor any other portion of his provinces, could be legitimately disposed of. It appears to me, that it behoves England, above all other countries in the world, to be extremely delicate and cautious how she aids in precipitating the entire separation and disposal of these States. Your Lordships will recollect, that this union of Belgium with Holland was a voluntary act on the part of the allies. Holland, no doubt, would willingly have returned to her ancient state, and have enjoyed her republican form of government; but it suited not the European Powers to allow to her that position; and on that account these provinces were united to the provinces of Holland, but they were, I contend again, voluntarily annexed. It was we, however, who chiefly derived the advantage of that annexation. For, in the treaty which we entered into with the king of the Netherlands, his Majesty of Great Britain engaged to restore all the Dutch colonies to the king of Holland which he had lost during the war, with the exception of the Cape of Good Hope, Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo; and why was the exception made but with a view to the sixth Article of that treaty? There was also a sum of money paid by this country, and a contribution advanced by other continental Powers, towards consolidating that European arrangement. [846](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_846%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20846%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c846) We, while paying money for the erection of the fortresses on the frontiers of Belgium, were doing so without reference to the exclusive benefit of Holland; nor was the money a payment for the purchase of her four colonies, which I have just named. By no means. These arrangements were made, and these fortresses were erected, with a view to check the possible aggressions which might be attempted by France; and for the sum paid by this country an equal sum was exacted from the king of the Netherlands, and disposed of in the same manner; and this was done under what may be called an European inspection; an inspection which was intrusted to my noble friend near me (the Duke of Wellington), who was appointed to see that the fortresses were erected or repaired according to the avowed European object of the treaty. So that, although I do not affirm that these circumstances should have prevented this country from taking any part in the separation of Belgium from Holland, yet I do say, that it becomes us, above all other nations, to be careful how we assist in further despoiling that Power, by whose spoliation already we have so much benefitted. Well, my Lords, after the independence of Belgium was virtually decided, many other protocols were issued. But I shall not enter into the details of the negotiation which took place, but come at once to a most memorable epoch—when (as I find by the eleventh and twelfth protocols) the conditions of this separation were laid down, and proposed to the king of the Netherlands. The king accepted these conditions. He was told they were final and irrevocable. These and other articles were, indeed, called "propositions," but they may be virtually considered final, because, in proposing them to the king of the Netherlands, he was assured that the Conference would never recognize any sovereign of Belgium who would not accede to them. Consequently, by his acceptance of them, he made them binding on the Conference. These articles, however, were rejected by Belgium at the time; and a long course of negotiation ensued, in which the king of the Netherlands met with nothing but insult. A communication was received by the Conference from the king during this negotiation, in which his Majesty expressed his hope, that these final and irrevocable conditions would be carried into execution. I will not repeat the contents of these protocols, but they went to re-assert, that the [847](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_847%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20847%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c847) same views were still entertained by the Conference, and the same conditions were to be annexed to the treaties to be made with Belgium as had already been adopted and determined upon. To these promises, and to these conditions, the Conference adhered with tolerable consistency for some time. I shall pass by much of what then occurred, though perhaps it would not be an uninstructive lesson if we were to go through the negotiation, to shew how little the interests of the sovereign of the Netherlands were actually consulted by his ancient ally and friendly mediator. About the end of May, or the beginning of June last, Prince Leopold came to be seriously thought of as the sovereign of Belgium, and from that time the decisions of the Congress appear to have undergone some change. It is not essential that I should go into the particulars of Prince Leopold's election, and I am not anxious to do so. Suffice it to say, that the Conference then receded from the "final and irrevocable" articles previously agreed upon, and brought forward certain new propositions, which I shall not dwell upon, as they were rejected, and led to no practical result. Neither shall I dwell upon the military movement of the Dutch government, when the king of the Netherlands felt himself grossly outraged by the conduct of the new sovereign of Belgium, who, in his newly-assumed character, took possession of the ancient and undoubted possession of Holland. But I pass over all those matters, and hasten to the treaty, which is the real subject for your Lordships' consideration. This treaty was agreed upon by the members of the Conference, in the month of October last, and consists of twenty-four articles drawn up by the Conference of London. Looking at this treaty, I am at a loss to determine whether its provisions are more impolitic or unjust. By one of the articles of this treaty, we guarantee all the articles of the treaty. Now, I ask the noble Earl opposite (Earl Grey) whether he is aware of the obligation which he undertakes in signing such a treaty? It has been, for a long time past, the acknowledged policy of the Government of this country to be extremely scrupulous of guaranteeing anything; and we have always been particularly anxious to avoid guaranteeing anything that we were not to do ourselves. When we had bound ourselves to act in conjunction with other Powers, we had frequently found that the onerous part of the guarantee was too apt to fall on us alone. I do not [848](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_848%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20848%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c848) believe, however, that your Lordships are aware of the extent of the responsibility which the Government of this country incurs by the treaty with Belgium. We guarantee the observance of all the articles in that treaty, and the least objection to many of those articles is, that it would be impossible for us to execute them. Amongst other things, for instance, we guarantee the perpetual payment by Belgium of a sum amounting to above 700,000l. a-year.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_15%22%20%5Co%20%22Link%20to%20this%20speech%20by%20Sir%20Arthur%20Wellesley) [*The Duke of Wellington*](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/sir-arthur-wellesley)

suggested, that the sum to be paid by Belgium, amounted to 840,000l. a-year.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_16%22%20%5Co%20%22Link%20to%20this%20speech%20by%20Mr%20George%20Hamilton-Gordon) [*The Earl of Aberdeen*](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-george-hamilton-gordon-3)

continued. My noble friend tells me that it amounts to 840,000l. a-year. I rather think, however, that he has been mistaken. It is 8,400,000 florins, which amount, I think, to about 700,000l. The annual payment of that sum by Belgium we have guaranteed by the 15th article of the treaty. I beg your Lordships to understand, that I do not object positively to all guarantees whatever. I might, for a powerful motive, be induced to guarantee the payment of a sum for a Government that was honest, trustworthy, well-known, and long established; but such was not the case with Belgium. Belgium, possessing a government just formed, just emerged from one revolution, and possibly about to be precipitated into another, how is it possible that we can make her pay? And according to this treaty, if Belgium refuses or fails to pay, this country is pledged in honour to pay every shilling of it. But this is not the only objection to the treaty. The whole of the articles of which it consists are so various and complicated, that the execution of them will require perpetual superintendence and interference. When noble Lords opposite sat at this side of the House, they constantly objected to Congresses: the present Government, however, appear so much in love with Conferences, that they have guaranteed the execution of a treaty which will render Conferences indispensable, for it is quite clear, that in the execution of the articles of this treaty there must be a constant reference to the guarantee of the Great Powers. The next article of the treaty to which I wish to draw your Lordships' attention is Article 9th, which relates to the free navigation of the canals and internal waters of Holland for Belgian commerce. This article is objectionable, if upon no other ground, because, as I contend, it makes frequent Conferences unavoidable. Upon every occasion of a quarrel [849](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_849%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20849%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c849) between the owner of a Belgian vessel and the Dutch Custom House, a Conference is liable to be called upon to enforce the guarantee. Not a day would pass in which we should not be liable to be called upon to interfere and enforce the guarantee we have made. That objection, however, applies, I will admit, only because of its impracticability. But, further—this stipulation surpasses, in injustice, anything which I have ever happened to meet with in the annals of diplomacy; and especially when it is considered that it emanates from, and is authorized by, a Power professing to be kindly disposed and amicably inclined to the Dutch nation! In the paper issued by the last Conference, of the 4th of January, they declare that this treaty and this article are only a development of those final and irrevocable articles to which I have before referred; that the king of the Netherlands has no reason to complain; and that the Conference have not deviated from the spirit of those original articles. Now, I will only refer to this single article relating to the navigation of the Scheldt and the Rhine. The original article relating to the navigation of these rivers, was in the Protocol, and was converted into what is called "a fundamental principle," which is a species of article that has always, I apprehend, been considered final and irrevocable. By that article (the third of the eleventh Protocol), regarding the trade and navigation of Belgium, it is declared that the terms of the articles 108, up to 117 inclusive, of the Act of the Congress of Vienna, should be applicable to the rivers which traversed the Dutch and Belgian territory. Ultimately, in order that there should be no possible mistake, the Plenipotentiary of his Majesty the king of the Netherlands received from the Conference at the time these articles were sent to them, or shortly after, the following communication. It is dated "Foreign Office, February 18," and signed "Palmerston," which was the day of their acceptance of the articles by the Dutch government. The letter runs thus:—'In submitting to your Excellency a copy of the Protocol, signed in Conference held to-day, the Conference has desired me to express to your Excellency, that the three articles of the treaty destined to establish the separation of Belgium from Holland, apply solely to the navigation of the rivers which traversed and separated the two countries.' Such was what the original article was considered, accepted, and declared to be, over and over again. [850](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_850%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20850%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c850) Now, my Lords, what is the article of the treaty? The corresponding article of the treaty is a development of the original article with a vengeance. It says, that the navigation of the Scheldt to Antwerp shall be under the common inspection of Commissioners appointed by the governments of Belgium and Holland—that moderate rates of pilotage shall be fixed by common consent—that the duties shall be the same for the Dutch and the Belgian commerce—and that the intermediate waters between the Scheldt and the Rhine shall be reciprocally free. The words of the article are, 'Il est également convenu que la navigation des eaux intermédiaires entre 1'Escaut et 'le Rhin pour arriver d' Anvers au Rhin et 'vice versâ, restera reciproquement libre; 'et qu'elle ne sera assujettie qu'à des 'péages modéres qui seront provisoirement 'les memes pour le commerce des deux 'pays.' The Conference, in its impartiality to Holland, directs the intermediate waters between the Scheldt and the Rhine to be free for Belgium. No duty is to be levied on Belgian commerce which is not also levied on the Dutch commerce. The effect of this article, therefore, is, to force the king of Holland to tax his own subjects on his own waters, for there is not an inch of Belgian territory within those "intermediate" waters. Was ever so monstrous a power attempted to be exercised by an ally over the sovereign rights of an independent prince? Have they given any, the least reason for such a course of proceeding? Not an inch of Belgian territory is washed by these waters. And this the Conference have decreed, without consulting the only party whose interest is involved—namely, the king of Holland; but they, out of their great mercy to him, have allowed the right of navigating these rivers to remain to the Belgians, without any reciprocity, or equivalent, to the king of Holland! Why, my Lords, I wish to know what is meant by the terms of this article. It says, 'the com'merce shall be free from the Scheldt to 'the Rhine.' Now, it is not an easy matter to say what is the Rhine. In a treaty entered into with some of the States bordering on the Rhine, by the king of the Netherlands, he had agreed to consider the Leek and the Waal as forming together the Rhine; but the true river, correctly called the Rhine, is a very inconsiderable stream, and not fit for commerce. But what right has Belgium to avail herself of this definition to navigate the internal waters of Holland? This might form the [851](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_851%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20851%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c851) matter of the first dispute under the treaty. I do not mean to say that such a question is not a very fit matter for negotiation between the king of Holland and Belgium. He may allow these waters to be navigated by the Belgians as well as by the subjects of any other Power. But according to this article, a right is given to the Belgians to navigate all the waters between the Belgian frontier and any part of Holland. If any dispute were to arise as to what should be considered the Rhine, it may be contended that the Rhine is not the conventional Rhine, but the true Rhine; and it may be further asserted, that not only those waters, but the waters of Zealand and of South Holland, and those communicating internally with Leyden, Utrecht, and even with Haarlem, will come within the construction and contemplation of this article. If the Conference guarantee the execution of this article, they must, therefore, define the geographical boundaries of the Rhine. This, however, is matter beyond their jurisdiction, because it lies not with them to consider whether the Leck and Waal shall be taken to constitute the Rhine or not—when other nations have agreed by treaty so to consider that question. This very first dispute would lead to great disorder, in consequence of the various opinions which may be entertained on a subject of so much difficulty; and it would be impossible for this country to interfere, by virtue of this article, to enforce its own guarantee, without giving rise to an interminable dispute about this vague right of navigation. My Lords, the king of Holland has protested against this article among the rest; and is it surprising that he should do so? Seeing how little his interests have been taken care of by the Conference, and neglected by this country, on which he had every reason to hope he might implicitly have relied, I cannot feel much astonishment that he should not be inclined to concur in the interpretation of any of the articles which the Conference, or this country, might give to them. Here is another article, perhaps equally preposterous, and equally unjust, for friends and neutrals to have proposed. It is that which entitles Belgium to a free passage through one of the principal fortresses of Holland, that of Maestricht. Such are the words of this portion of the treaty. This permission, as worded, would extend itself so as to endure even in time of war. Here, then, is another condition to which it was impossible that the king of Holland could subscribe. It is a proposition, indeed, [852](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_852%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20852%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c852) which strikes at the root of the sovereignty of every independent prince in Europe. If it be said that one must give a convenient debouché to the commerce of Belgium, why, I ask, is Belgium to be presented with this privilege more than other nations? Is it because that country has revolted from its sovereign? Does the fact of that revolt give Belgium any preferable claim on Holland? There is one other article to which I must be allowed to allude—I mean that which refers to the arrangement as to the duchy of Luxemburg, a portion of which is taken from the king of the Netherlands, without any colour, pretence, or excuse. I cannot believe that the governments of Austria and Prussia will ever ratify a treaty containing this article, which is in direct violation of one of the first principles of the Germanic Confederation. The fundamental act constituting the Germanic Confederation, mutually guarantees the whole of the possessions which constitute the Union, and distinctly declares, that there shall be no voluntary cession, by any of the Powers, of any part of the territory, without the free consent of the Union. These being amongst the fundamental articles of the Germanic Union, I know not by what right it is assumed to take half the duchy of Luxemburg from the king of Holland, giving him compensation here and there in Limberg. It was distinctly declared, in the early communications on this subject, that the duchy of Luxemburg, being a part of the Germanic Confederation, could not be compromised by any arrangements which had or should have relation to Belgium. It is true, that after this express declaration, the king of Holland, in deference to his allies, expressed his willingness to submit to an arrangement as to the duchy, upon receiving a satisfactory territorial indemnity; but he reserved to himself the right of judging whether any indemnity offered to him was satisfactory or not. The indemnity now offered to him, I am willing to admit, is convenient enough in some respects for the king of Holland; but it is an arrangement by which he loses 50,000 inhabitants, and no one can wonder that he has refused to accede to such an arrangement. Unless the Austrian and Prussian governments are under a control which I cannot understand, it will not be possible for them, as members of the Germanic Confederation, to sanction or ratify this treaty. I admit the propriety of mediation by friendly Powers in such a case, but that the allies have any right arbitrarily to make, [853](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_853%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20853%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c853) such arrangements, and to force their acceptance on the king of Holland, is a principle to which I can never agree. The Conference of London has, throughout all its meetings, professed great care for the interests of Holland, and it has been said, that by this treaty Holland is placed in a better condition than it ever was before. It was said, that when Holland gained her high name amongst the nations of Europe, she was not allied with Belgium. And this is very true. But it must be remembered that Holland was then a republic, and it was not her policy to extend her territory. Conquest, European conquest at least, was entirely opposed to the policy of such a form of government. But the case is widely different now—to suit our own views of European policy, and to check the aggrandizement of France, we erected Holland into a formidable State; and subsequently recognised the sovereign of that country as king of the United Provinces; thus throwing a counterbalancing and substantive weight into the scale of the Powers of Europe. By this means you no longer enabled him to pursue that policy as king, which, in ancient times as a chief of a republic he felt it his interest to adopt. But, independent of that consideration, let me ask, what is there in the present condition of Holland to compensate her for the losses which she has sustained; for the giving up of those colonies to which I have already alluded, for the construction of fortresses at a large expense, which were not only not useful, but, perhaps, injurious to the country? How has she been compensated for the loss of all she had acquired in another hemisphere, and for the opening of the Scheldt, which has been insisted on ever since the treaty of Munster, down to the French Revolution? We have desired to navigate the Scheldt even to its sources. I do not suppose that the Dutch government would, at this day, put forward any pretensions to the exclusive navigation of the Scheldt. But among friends—among allies at least—it appears a very small compensation to have allotted it in consideration of what it had had to give up. I am, therefore, utterly at a loss to understand in what manner Holland has been benefited by the means referred to by the Conference. Possibly it may be by the neutrality of Belgium. I think the king must be very easily satisfied with a compensation, indeed, if, after the solemn professions which his allies have made of zeal for the prosperity [854](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_854%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20854%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c854) of his kingdom and throne, such a species of compensation is accepted by him as satisfactory. But, my Lords, if the terms of the treaty be unjust and impolitic, the manner of enforcing them is, if possible, still worse; for how is it enforced? My Lords, those articles to which I have called your attention were originally framed and propounded as final and irrevocable—of that fact I have given you some proof; and they were communicated to Holland with, as I contend, a threat. These obnoxious articles—it is difficult to believe it—were actually drawn up and agreed to without any concert whatsoever with the king of Holland, and without his slightest knowledge. Such a proceeding on the part of a Conference which makes pretensions to impartiality, can scarcely be credited. These articles were communicated to the Dutch plenipotentiary, with a letter, of which the following is an extract:—'They contain the final and irrevocable 'decisions of the Five Powers, who, by 'common consent among themselves, are re'solved to bring about an entire acceptance 'by the averse party, whoever shall reject 'them.' They have resolved, themselves, to bring about the acceptance !—very well knowing that they would be rejected. The Dutch government accepts these articles as a matter of negotiation; but, at least, it entreats to be heard upon some of them, in order that they may be modified, so as to agree with the interest, independence, and dignity of the sovereign. To that request the Conference replied by a note, addressed to the Dutch Plenipotentiary, stating that they owed it to the frankness which characterized an honest course—to the friendship which united their Sovereigns to the king of the Netherlands—to declare, that neither the substance nor the letter of the twenty-four articles could undergo modification. This is the friendly mediation so loudly boasted of! My Lords, I could little expect such language to proceed from the noble Lords opposite, when I recollect that, at the commencement of these negotiations, some of them said to us, "Although you may give these parties advice, yet, above all things, let it be of the most friendly kind, and without any active mediation." I little expected, my Lords, to see this course adopted by those identical noble Lords. I own I cannot understand this inconsistency. What I can understand is, the possibility of proposing to such a state as Belgium, which has never, heretofore, enjoyed national [855](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_855%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20855%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c855) independence, certain conditions for her acceptance, on penalty, in the event of her rejecting them, of your refusing to recognise that State: this I can understand. But how you should be able to pursue the same course towards your own intimate ally—a power whom you have ever, hitherto, found to be worthy of respect, and between whom and other foreign powers you have always understood an honourable connexion to have subsisted—this is what I really cannot possibly comprehend. Those articles, I repeat, were determined upon without the participation or knowledge of the king of the Netherlands or his Plenipotentiaries. This I find stated in the note of the Dutch Plenipotentiaries, and it is not denied or replied to in the elaborate document put forward by the Conference. It was impossible for the Dutch Plenipotentiaries, who were never consulted on the subject, to suppose that there was any intention to interfere with the internal navigation of Holland, and therefore they had made no representations on the subject. The outrageous indecency and disrespect with which the Dutch government has been treated, then, I say, greatly aggravates and embitters the injury done to the king of Holland. All this was done under the character of friendly mediation. General Sebastiani, in his note to the French minister at Brussels, states distinctly, 'the Con'ference at London is a Conference of me'diation, and it is the intention of the king's 'government that it should never lose 'this character.' By the articles of the Treaty, I say, that the Conference has interfered with the lawful sovereignty of the king of Holland, in the provinces of Holland, as well as in the Belgian provinces. Putting the claims of friendship and alliance out of the question, I say that the Dutch government had a right to have been consulted. At the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 1818, a declaration was made, that the Allies might mediate upon the call, and at the desire, of any of the contracting Powers; but that the party at whose instance the Conference was called, should be united in the deliberations. This was an act of that association called the Holy Alliance; and, though it went to limit the power of that Holy Alliance, the present Government seemed very willing to dispense with the limitation. Under the rule laid down by the Allies, they were only to interfere upon a formal invitation, and with the express reservation of the right to the party inviting, that he [856](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_856%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20856%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c856) should take part in the deliberations, either by himself or his Plenipotentiary. The king of Holland, in this case, insisted on his right under the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, and complained that the acts of the Conference was a violation of that right—and how was he answered? It was said—"It is very true, by the article to which you have referred, you had a right to be united in our deliberations, and you were united. When we wanted your advice, we asked it, and all through the negotiations you, or your representatives, had free access to us." Now, is not this answer a miserable quibble, when it is admitted, that the articles of the treaty were decided without the participation or knowledge of the king of Holland? I say, give me the Holy Alliance in preference to an Alliance which justifies its conduct towards a friendly power by such an evasion. I do not wish to extend the comparison further; but so far as the declaration at Aix-la-Chapelle, and the manner in which the claim of the king of Holland under that declaration has been treated, I say, that the Holy Alliance appears to great advantage—for, although they might condemn, they did hear. It might be said, that the course pursued towards Holland, though not strictly defensible on other grounds, is justifiable, because it was done to preserve the peace of Europe. Now, I say, that if the wit of man was employed to invent a cause of war—of interminable war—none better could be devised than the treaty which is the subject of consideration. Every article of this treaty is pregnant with war. You cannot proceed a step for the purpose of carrying the treaty into effect without producing war. The first step which the noble Earl is bound to take is, to enforce the ratification of the treaty by the Dutch government; and he has already had a pretty good sample of Dutch constancy and determination. War with Holland, then, is the first step, and where that is to end, I shall not take upon myself to predict. Your Lordships will now see the strange and impracticable position the treaty has brought us to. Where it will end I cannot see, but one thing I can see, that all this tends directly to the gain of France. The last time we entered into a war with Holland the effect was, to throw that country into the arms of France. It is a singular circumstance that the principal grievance which our Government then complained of was, that the Dutch were supposed to manifest a disposition to acknowledge [857](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_857%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20857%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c857) our revolted Colonies. By declaring war against Holland, however, we threw it for a time into the hands of the French. I own, my Lords, I do not fear the enforcement of the ratification of the treaty at present. I have no doubt that France is well content with the footing which we are on with Holland; and she is sure of having a good friend in Belgium. On a former occasion, when this subject came under discussion, in reference to the application made to Prince Leopold to accept the government of Belgium, I took the liberty of predicting, that any Sovereign who was elected to rule over Belgium must be essentially French. It was upon this ground, amongst others, I deprecated the acceptance of the Belgian crown by that illustrious Prince, who, as I think, unfortunately for himself, and unfortunately for this country, has since assumed that crown. When Belgium became an independent nation, our only security, in my opinion, and I then stated it, was in drawing closer the ties which united us to Holland. Subsequent events confirmed that opinion. Prince Leopold, I conceive, has proved the justness of my anticipation. How does he act? Has he not furnished a good answer to the French Ministry, when they are charged with giving Belgium to an individual closely connected with England? Well might they say, "What signifies his connection with England?—what signifies his naturalization? Could a son of France have acted with more devotion than he has done in forwarding the interests of France?" Upon arriving to preside over the revolutionary constitution of Belgium, the first act of Prince Leopold was a declaration of direct hostility to the king of Holland. The king of the Netherlands, while trusting to the promises of the five great Powers, advanced his army for the purpose of carrying the separation into effect. But what was the conduct of the king of the Belgians upon that occasion? Why, he instantly despatched a messenger to the king of the French to intreat his immediate assistance. Now, one should suppose he would have thought of apologizing to the Conference in the first instance; but perhaps he conjectured, that from that quarter he should receive nothing but Protocols, and that it would require something more substantial to repel the bullets of the Dutch army. In consequence of the advance of the French troops, it was agreed that the Prince of Orange should lead back the army under [858](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_858%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20858%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c858) his command;—and the next step of the king of the Belgians was, to intreat that 12,000 French might be left in his new territory, for the purpose of protecting him. That request, however, was not acceded to, principally in consequence of what had been said upon the subject in this House by my noble friend, the Marquis of Londonderry. Yet scarcely had the French troops retired beyond the Belgian frontier, when they returned back again in thousands, and, having changed their dress, took service in Belgium. Another point to which I wish to call your Lordships' attention is, the proposed demolition of the fortresses. Noble Lords opposite said, that this was a question with which France was to have nothing to do, and that it was to be settled between the Allies and Belgium. It was also said, that the fortresses were greater than Belgium had resources to maintain, and that her neutrality being guaranteed was sufficient for her protection. What did the king of the Belgians do in this instance? Why, he said, "I'll destroy the fortresses, and give an additional proof of my confidence in the king of the French, and of my brotherly affection for the French people." For my own part, I believe that the king of the Belgians will make the French very welcome to any number of fortresses they may choose to take. The question which has recently occurred respecting the demolition of some of them, will show what sort of policy is pursued. Among the fortresses proposed to be destroyed are Philipville, Marieville, Mons, and Ath. But, said France at this moment, "No, not Philipville and Marieville, for these we can get whenever we think proper. We want that those fortresses shall be destroyed which have been constructed, not on our frontiers, but in Belgium." This was the language of that Power with which the king of the Belgians had entered into such friendly relations. I contend, my Lords, that the whole result of the engagements entered into by the proceedings of the Conference must inevitably lead to hostilities—they cannot possibly be prevented, if such injustice be persisted in against Holland. The only means which even the Conference itself has to insist upon the fulfilment of those engagements is, by having recourse to force against the king of the Netherlands. To show your Lordships how vicious is the adoption of such a system of policy on the part of England, it is only necessary for me to advert to the [859](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_859%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20859%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c859) language of an eminent Statesman, whose authority ought to have great weight with noble Lords on the opposite side. In 1781, Mr. Fox put a case, in which he supposed that the then king of France, Louis 16th, might be engaged in discussions for the purpose of securing universal dominion, and weakening the power of Great Britain. With a view to this favourable scheme, Mr. Fox supposed that the king of France might say, "Encourage domestic war by all means—encourage revolt in her colonies—set her own subjects in open strife against each other. This will be playing our game precisely to the very point we could wish." My Lords, I will not say how far this system has been acted upon on the present occasion; but this I will say, that I see domestic differences arising, which must give rise to as much strife as foreign warfare. I see nothing in the policy of his Majesty's Ministers that is not likely to lead to the most disastrous results. But Mr. Fox goes on to say, that 'all this may be supposed to have occurred between the king of France and his subjects, and still further it might have been said, that in order to complete the design of establishing an universal monarchy, they must destroy the other rival Powers of Europe. The naval Powers were the most to be dreaded; and, after Great Britain, of those naval Powers, the Dutch were the first to be overthrown. How could they do that without weakening themselves? How can this be effected? Why, by instigating our faithful servants, the Ministers of Great Britain, to go to war with their nearest, dearest, and best friends, the Dutch. True, their interests are inseparable; they are like the right hand and the left of one immense and terrible body; by a brotherly combination of strength and action they are irresistible, and the House of Bourbon must fall before them; but divide them, nay, not only separate, but set them to tear one another, and they will crumble before us. To do this would be impracticable with any other set of men; but nothing is impossible for those Ministers, in the scale of absurdity or madness, to attempt. This would, no doubt, be said, and what must be the astonishment—what the feelings—what the transport of Frenchmen—when they perceive Great Britain go to war with the Dutch with out a cause?—for he declared he never yet could discover a cause for which we went to war with that Power, forgetting [860](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_860%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20860%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c860) all the interests, all the policy, and all the connexion by which we had ever been, and ought always to be, guided with respect to her.'\* Yet such, continued the noble Earl, was the war into which the Ministers were going to precipitate the country. The noble Earl (Earl Grey) went so far as to announce it to the Dutch. He said to them, "If you do not accept of these degrading terms, I'll force you to accept them." But then the noble Earl and his colleagues said, that they did not entertain any bad feelings towards the Dutch, and were, on the contrary, prepared to cultivate all the ancient relations of friendship with them. Most assuredly their policy had a very different effect. The noble Earl had excited in Holland a feeling of the most bitter hatred towards this country—the very name of England was abhorred and execrated by the Dutch. The Dutch knew—and the French took good care they should know it—that it was to the noble Earl and his colleagues they were indebted for every thing unjust, oppressive, and ungenerous. In the course of the last year, the British navy was found no less than three times prepared to act hostilely towards Holland, and hostile demonstrations were made on two occasions. The officers of the Dutch navy had come to a universal engagement never to strike to the British navy. They had determined to follow the example of a brother officer, who had blown up his vessel, or to go to the bottom, rather than surrender. The Dutch were no braggarts, and he knew very well that the British navy would make very light of any threats of this description; but he stated the fact only to show that such an inveterate feeling existed in Holland against the people of this country as had no precedent in the history of civilized warfare. When he found the interest of our ancient allies so grossly violated, and the personal honour of the king of Holland himself so loudly called in question, he thought he could not do less than call upon their Lordships to express their decided opinion upon the subject. With these feelings he should beg leave to ask their Lordships to agree to the following Address to his Majesty:—

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium#S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_17) "To assure his Majesty that we duly appreciate the efforts of his Majesty to terminate, in conjunction with his Allies, the dissensions which have prevailed in the kingdom of the Netherlands, and to maintain \*Hansard's Parl. Hist. vol. xxii. p. 698. [861](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_861%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20861%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c861) inviolate the peace of Europe. That, without calling in question the necessity of facilitating a separation of Holland and Belgium, upon just and equitable principles, we beg humbly to represent to his Majesty, that we have seen with much concern the project of a treaty which has been made public, and which has for its object the provisions consequent upon a final separation of the two States; but which, in our humble apprehension, contains stipulations incompatible with the interests of this country, and injurious to the honour of his Majesty.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium#S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_18) "Humbly to express to his Majesty our conviction, that an engagement to guarantee the execution of all the articles of which the said treaty consists, would be improvident and dangerous; that we fear it might lead to the necessity of imposing additional burthens upon his Majesty's subjects; and as the interests which are involved in some of these articles are various and complicated, the interference requisite to ensure their execution must be so frequent, that we cannot but contemplate the probability of future discussions calculated to affect the stability of the general peace.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium#S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_19) "Humbly to submit to his Majesty, that stipulations entered into without the participation or consent of the king of the Netherlands, by which a privilege is given to the subjects of a foreign State to navigate in the internal waters and canals of Holland, and to carry roads or canals through the Dutch territory, must be regarded as a manifest violation of national independence, and as destructive of the rights of sovereignty.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium#S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_20) "Humbly to remind his Majesty, that it has long been the established policy of this country, and the practice of his Majesty's royal predecessors, to cultivate the strictest union with the Dutch nation—an union which has heretofore been considered as greatly conducive to the security of both States, and as the best support of the liberties of Europe; and which is still not only agreeable to their respective interests, but essential to their common welfare.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium#S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_21) "That, to dictate a treaty to the Dutch government, by which the interests of Holland are so deeply affected, and to compel that government to accept it without modification, we cannot but consider as unjust, and as likely to prove fatal to the maintenance of that ancient and intimate alliance, which has so happily subsisted between the two countries.

[862](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_862%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20862%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c862)

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium#S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_22) "Humbly, therefore, to pray, that his Majesty will be graciously pleased to issue such directions as may render the said treaty, in the articles above referred to, more consistent with the regard which is due to the honour of his Majesty's Crown, to the security of our own permanent interests, and to the just claims of his Majesty's faithful and natural ally."

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_23%22%20%5Co%20%22Link%20to%20this%20speech%20by%20Mr%20Charles%20Grey) [*Earl Grey*](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-charles-grey-1)

spoke as follows:—My Lords, the noble Earl who has just sat down has told you, in the course of his long and able address, that the Motion with which he had to conclude was an extraordinary one, and only to be justified by extraordinary circumstances. This admission is no more than he ought to have made when he commenced by stating that he wished to prevent the execution of a treaty, which, after a long and arduous negotiation, has at last been brought to a conclusion. On that conclusion has depended nothing less than the peace of Europe. The noble Earl states, that by this treaty not only are the interests of England sacrificed, but all the interests of Europe; he says the honour of the Crown has been degraded, and our commerce destroyed, and he imputes all the mischief to his Majesty's Ministers, but more especially to me. Never was any charge more unfounded. The noble Earl goes on to ascribe to my colleagues and myself, infinitely more power than we are conscious of possessing, if he supposes that we, acting in a bad and malicious spirit, would influence all the other members of the Conference to join with us in such injustice, though their interest in the prosperity of Holland is no less involved than our own. Surely, my Lords, it cannot for a moment be imagined that by any efforts of ours, even were we capable of having recourse to any for so base a purpose, other Powers could be brought to give effect to a treaty which should destroy for ever the power of Holland, and aggrandize the power of France. But what is the charge brought against us by the noble Earl? It is nothing less than that we, with our eyes open, have got the other Allies to agree with us in an unnatural combination, and foul conspiracy against Holland. The noble Earl, in support of the positions he has advanced, has compared our conduct to what had occurred in the reign of Charles 2nd; but never were any two cases so dissimilar. There is no sort of analogy between them. The noble Earl does not take into consideration the extreme difficulty of our situation on first getting [863](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_863%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20863%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c863) into office. He seems to forget that we were placed in the very midst of those difficulties and embarrassments which were produced for us by the noble Earl and his predecessors. The noble Earl gives me much more consequence than I am entitled to, if he supposes I am capable of realizing all that he imputes to me in the criminatory speech he has addressed to your Lordships. For my own part, I am not disposed to arrogate to myself anything that fairly belongs to another; and to the labours and exertions of the noble Lord at the head of the Foreign Department I must give full credit. From him I have found the most earnest and zealous co-operation. I ask, is it owing to me, or to any counsels of mine, that this country has been involved in war, during a period of more than twenty years, and loaded with 800,000,000l. of debt? I ask, is it owing to me or to any counsels of mine, that, when that war was brought to a conclusion, a political system was established which has subsequently fallen to pieces by its own vices? I ask, is it owing to me, or to any counsels of mine, that, after the Revolution, which had recently taken place in France, Belgium followed the example, and rose against its Sovereign, thus dissolving a union which was originally founded on a vicious principle, and which, even in the opinion of the noble Duke himself, as declared before I came into office, can never be re-established? My Lords, I am not answerable for all these things. When I took on myself the office I hold, I found the country in difficulties; and I may be allowed to ask, am I to be answerable for the system which took its rise in the time of George 3rd? On coming into office I found the country involved in all the difficulties into which my predecessors had brought it. I found Belgium already separated from Holland, and my colleagues and myself endeavoured, under circumstances of the most embarrassing description, to substitute another system for that which had been destroyed by its own vices. It is very easy for the noble Earl to say, you should have done this and that; it is very easy to propound some particular course of policy; but the noble Earl and his friends must be aware that we had not to treat with old-established governments, but with two new governments, emanating from two Revolutions. In candour I must state, that I found France influenced by sound views and just principles of policy. The French government is entitled to the more credit for moderation, since it has been continually [864](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_864%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20864%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c864) assailed and goaded on by a furious party aiming at nothing but war. I need not explain to your Lordships how difficult must be the task of the government of France in its endeavours to preserve peace under such circumstances of violent excitement. If by your own power you could bring all the resources of Europe to one common object, it would be easy enough to effect it; but it should be borne in mind that, on being called to the counsels of the Sovereign, we found Europe a magazine of combustibles, which the slightest spark might set into a blaze from one end to the other. The task we had to perform was most arduous. Belgium, as I have before stated, had been separated from Holland. But the noble Earl seems not to admit the fact. I ask, however, had not the king of Holland been driven out of Belgium? Had he not acknowledged that an administrative separation of the two countries was necessary? Had not the Prince of Orange, by his proclamation at Antwerp, declared the necessity of a separate independence of Belgium? Had not noble Lords opposite, when called upon to assist in restoring the king of Holland to his rights as Sovereign of Belgium refused to do so? Had they not prescribed the duration of an armistice? Had they not prescribed that the limits to which Holland should return should be the same as before the Union of 1814? Whether they formally declared or not the separation to have taken place, it cannot be denied that it had taken place de facto. But then the noble Earl says "you should not proceed all at once to recognize the independence of Belgium." For myself I must say, that my most earnest wish was, that the Prince of Orange should have been raised to the Sovereignty of Belgium if practicable; but circumstances had occurred which completely put an end to any hope of that kind. This was the wish, not only of the Government of this country, but of that of France also. An opposition, however, was urged against it in a powerful quarter, and, to prevent the possibility of the Prince of Orange being appointed as the successor of his father, a separation was decreed. This fact cannot be denied, when I state that noble Lords opposite had sent Ministers to negociate with the Provisional Government of Belgium. Assuming, then, as I must, the re-union of Holland and Belgium to be impossible, what, I would ask, remained to be done? I now openly state that I have been misrepresented in the part I have taken in these transactions. I now declare that [865](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_865%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20865%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c865) there was no more anxious wish of my heart than that Holland should be placed in a situation which should give her a strong defensive frontier, and enable her to take her proper position among the Powers of Europe. But it was necessary, at the same time, to see in what situation Belgium would be placed. Let me for a moment call the attention of your Lordships to the words of the Conference on this subject. The Conference said, "Considering the present moment to be favourable to an arrangement for settling the equilibrium of Europe, it is necessary that Belgium, prosperous, should find in her new state of political existence resources which she can maintain." If Belgium was left without resources, without the means of transport for her provisions, what must be the effect, not only to her own interests, but to the general interests of Europe? Would she not be justly discontented? Would she not take the very first opportunity that presented itself of attaching herself to any Power that was likely to free her from such oppressions, and would she not naturally look to France? On these grounds it was, that the Conference proceeded to lay down certain bases of separation between the two countries. Your Lordships will find them contained in the Protocol of the 27th of January. The territorial division is much the same as formerly, the whole of ancient Holland being preserved to that Power, while she receives, in addition, a certain part of the kingdom of Belgium. It will be recollected that Holland assented to the first proposition made respecting the limits, but Belgium could not be brought to acquiesce in them. It is asked, however, "Why not enforce the original stipulations?" My answer is, that more than one party was to be consulted. The interests of more than one party were involved. Let your Lordships only consider the state of France at the time, and reflect what must have been the consequence of any attempt to compel Belgium into an assent. The consequence must have been an immediate war. Only look to the state of Poland at the time; of Russia, Prussia, and Italy. I say, if anything like compulsion by force of arms had been attempted, a general war must have been inevitable. I felt regret at not seeing the original negotiations carried into effect, believing them to be just and reasonable: but will the noble Earl state that he has ever yet known any negotiations to be finally concluded in the terms originally proposed? No; some modifications are always to be [866](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_866%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20866%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c866) expected in affairs of this kind. Our object was, not to favour this or that Power, but to avoid war. The second propositions, being different in some respects from those first submitted for their adoption, were accepted by the Belgians and King Leopold. The noble Earl has talked of the intrigues for the Duke of Nemours, the Prince of Leiningen, and others, as candidates for the sovereignty of Belgium. All I can say is, that this Government has never been a party to anything of the kind—no, not even to the election of Prince Leopold. We felt, however, the very great necessity of there being in Belgium a regular government, and, when Prince Leopold was proposed as its sovereign, it was quite impossible that there could be any objection to him. A better choice could not be made under any circumstances. I entertain the highest opinion of his virtues and talents, and he has, on some trying occasions, given the strongest proofs of both. As to the charge urged against him by the noble Earl, of his being the creature of France, I believe it in my conscience to be totally destitute of foundation. Any conduct more calculated to prove beneficial to the interests of this country, or to entitle him to the deep gratitude of his own people, cannot be conceived than that of the king of the Belgians. I hold the principle of non-interference, as a general maxim, as strongly as ever I have done; but then I am not prepared to say, that there may not be some proper exceptions to the rule. In the present case, however, there has been no interference on our part, for the people were left to their own free choice of a government under the sanction of the five great Powers. The noble Earl then proceeded to state, that their Lordships had had several discussions on this subject before; and when we interfered to prevent the French Duke de Nemours from being elected king of Belgium, all history justified him in saying, that if the choice of a sovereign by one country furnished cause of danger to other states, other states had, on that ground, and on that ground alone, a right to interfere. Had not we, then, a right to interfere with the election of the Duke de Nemours, closely connected as he was with the Royal Family of France? If the noble Earl had seen the Duke de Nemours enthroned in Belgium, would he not have come forward, with sneers much better founded than those in which he had indulged that night, to protest against our neglect of British interests? If, then, we had a right to protest [867](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_867%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20867%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c867) against the election of the Duke of Nemours, so had the French government a right to interfere with the election of Prince Leuchtenberg. But all this merely showed the difficulties by which the five Powers had been hampered all through these negotiations. He had now explained to the House the situation in which we were, when the eighteen articles now accepted by Belgium were refused by Holland. On this refusal, a long negotiation again took place—a negotiation which was interrupted at last by the invasion of Belgium by the troops of Holland. One of the disadvantages of his present situation was, that he could not do justice to his case without stating arguments and facts which, if disclosed, might perhaps impede the progress of present negotiations. He would say nothing more of that invasion, than that it was an unexpected and even an unwise proceeding. It was certainly contrary to the spirit of one of the protocols. It was made, too, without notice, and even under some degree of disguise and concealment. For Sir Charles Bagot, our ambassador at the Hague, had no notification of it, and the Dutch ambassador, when he came here to conclude the treaty, assured us that he left Holland without knowing that such an invasion was in contemplation, and, when called upon for an explanation of it, told us that he had no explanation to give. It was under these circumstances that an English fleet—which, the noble Earl said, had now been sent three times with hostile intentions to Holland—was ordered to assemble in the Downs; and he said, boldly, that in his opinion, Ministers would have grossly neglected their duty if they had not employed the means within their power to force the Dutch to renew the armistice which they had violated. "But then," said the noble Lord, "the French army advanced into Belgium, and that is a proof that Prince Leopold is subservient to France." Now he really asked the noble Earl, what he would have had Prince Leopold to do in the circumstances in which he was placed? Prince Leopold had recently arrived in the country, and found its finances in confusion, its army disorganized, and that armistice broken which we had compelled Belgium to conclude, when she was successfully invading the states of Holland, unprepared at that time for any attack. Was, then, Holland, which had prepared her means in tranquillity procured by the interference of the Allies, to be permitted to make an attack upon Belgium, when she [868](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_868%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20868%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c868) was unprepared either to meet or to resist it? The noble Earl had told them, that Prince Leopold should have appealed at once to the Conference. Supposing he had appealed to the Conference, what would have been the result? Why this—that before he could have got an answer from the Conference, Belgium would have been overrun. The noble Earl had even turned aside from his argument to indulge in another sneer, for he had told them, that if Prince Leopold had made such an application to the Conference, all that he would have got in reply would have been another protocol. But to return from this digression. The French army having advanced into Belgium, compelled the Dutch to retire. The Conference then took the case into consideration, and having done so, approved of all that France had done. "But then," said the noble Lord and some of his able coadjutors, "you have got a French army introduced into Belgium—how will you manage to get it out again?" He had told the noble Earl and his friends, at the time, that he relied on the good faith of the French government, and time had since proved that his reliance had not been vain, for Belgium had been evacuated. "But then," said the noble Lord, "the French troops returned to Brussels disguised in blouses." He had also heard that story; but, from the information which he had received, he believed that there was no truth in it. The noble Earl might, perhaps, have better information on the point than he had; the noble Earl appeared to rely upon Dutch authority; but if he would only take a few facts from Belgian authority, he would learn that there were some thousands of Prussian soldiers serving in the Dutch army. For his own part, he believed that there was just as much truth in one of these stories as in the other, and not a whit more. But then the noble Earl found fault with the stay of the French officers at Brussels after their troops had evacuated Belgium. For his part he fully believed they had not remained longer in that city than was necessary to give some form to the new levies. Having established these points, he would now proceed to detail the course of proceedings which the Conference had afterwards pursued. They took the protocol of the 27th of January as the basis of their proceedings. This produced a series of objections both from Holland and from Belgium. It was then proposed that each of these two parties should take the statement of the other, and [869](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_869%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20869%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c869) make his own observations upon it. It was then found that the two parties entertained such conflicting views, that no arrangement could be formed between them. What, then, was the Conference to do? Informed as it was of all the facts in dispute—knowing the views of the different parties—looking back at the basis laid down in the protocol of the 27th of January—charged, too, as it was, with the conservation of the general peace of Europe, what could the Conference do but take the whole matter into its own hands, and act as arbiter in that which they could not otherwise bring to a satisfactory conclusion? The Conference then met in a spirit of strict impartiality and justice: indeed, if favour was felt towards any party, it was felt towards Holland, and not towards Belgium. Acting in that spirit of impartiality and justice, and influenced by the principles which he had already described, the Conference produced the twenty-four articles. He had before asked their Lordships to consider what the Conference could do under the circumstances? He now asked that question again. Could they have united Belgium with any other foreign Power? That was obviously impossible. There were no means whatever left for securing the peace of Europe except the erection of Belgium into a neutral State, affording by its neutrality a barrier of defence to other States against aggression. "But," said the noble Lord, "the twenty-four articles are inconsistent with the honour of this country, are injurious to Holland, are such as Holland neither can nor ought to submit to;" nay, more, are such as the noble Lord thinks sufficient to justify him in exciting Holland to resist them. It may, therefore, not be inconsistent with the due consideration of this subject to examine what the points of difference between the two nations are on these articles. He would prove to the House, that they were so slight and insignificant that it was impossible not to see, and seeing not to pity, the extreme virulence which had built a charge upon them. What, then, were the objections of Holland to the twenty-four articles? What were the points upon which she was so much injured that she needs must dissent from a treaty from which, in other respects, she received so much advantage? They were, the internal navigation permitted to Belgium; the free passage given to Belgian subjects on their route to Germany through Sittard and Maestricht; and the claim which the king of the Netherlands made upon the duchy of Luxemburg. He [870](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_870%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20870%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c870) wished the House and the people of England to understand, that all the speech of the noble Earl came shortly to this—that rather than there should be reserved to Belgium the right of navigating the Scheldt, of passing through Maestricht and Sittard, and of exchanging a part of the province of Limburg for part of the duchy of Luxemburg, the noble Earl was prepared to risk a general war. Rather than Antwerp should have a free traffic on the Rhine, and Limburg be assigned to Holland for part of Luxemburg, the noble Earl would throw the whole Continent into confusion. Fiat justitia, ruat cœlum, was the cry of the noble Earl; and if, in the performance of strict justice, war should be the consequence, the noble Earl was ready to undertake it. But let the noble Earl ask himself whether, when the question of carrying on that war should be formally propounded to the Commons and people of England, the Commons of England would afford him the Supplies essential to carry on a war begun on three such paltry matters. He did not think it necessary to dwell further on these subjects; but still he thought it might not be uninteresting to examine them a little more in detail. There was a protocol in which the noble Earl declared that he recognized the hand of an able master, which he praised for its ingenuity, but which he condemned for its lack of sound reasoning and acute argument. To whom the noble Earl attributed that paper, he could not tell; but a more able, indeed a more unanswerable paper, he had never read. He might rest the whole question relative to the navigation of the Scheldt on the very able manner in which it was treated in that paper. How, then, did the case stand? In the basis of separation annexed to the protocol of the 27th of January, it was stated that there should be a free navigation to the subjects of each Power in the waters passing through the limits of both. Now the right of 'free navigation' depended on the Treaty of Vienna, and that treaty explicitly said, that the navigation, not merely of all rivers, but of all the branches of the said rivers up to their mouths, should be free. It was therefore untrue that this stipulation had been made expressly in favour of Belgium. What, however, had been the attention paid to the Treaty of Vienna as to the waters of Holland by the king of the Netherlands? He would inform their Lordships in a very few words. For the last fifteen years that sovereign had held out against that interpretation [871](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_871%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20871%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c871) which all the diplomatists had put upon the treaty, and which every honest man in Europe must of necessity put upon it. Though the terms of the treaty were most explicit, the king of the Netherlands maintained that the branch of the Leck only should be free. He asked, when such was the case, whether it would have been prudent to have left such a point unsettled in any treaty of peace made between Belgium and Holland? It was therefore stated distinctly in the protocol, that Belgium was to have the right to navigate the rivers which extend from the Scheldt to the Rhine. How could this be an injury to Holland? This proposal was made to the king of Holland at the same time that it was made to the government of Belgium. No answer was given to it. The proposal, he repeated, was made to the king of Holland on the 15th of October, and no answer was given to it till the 15th of December. The most remarkable feature in this transaction was, that, though the answer of the Dutch government was communicated to us on the 14th of December, it was communicated to the Cabinet of St. Petersburgh on the 5th, and was even submitted to the two Chambers of Holland previously to its being submitted to us. The free navigation of the rivers between the Scheldt and the Rhine would not interfere either with the commerce or with the defence of Holland. If Holland was what Holland once had been, and if Dutchmen were not changed from their former nature, he would never believe that the skill and industry of Holland would not be able to enter into competition with the skill and industry of Belgium, even though Belgium had the free navigation of the Scheldt. This point, of the free navigation of the Scheldt, and of a free route through Maestricht and Sittart into the confines of Germany, was all the advantage which Belgium received from this arrangement. All the other points were decidedly in favour of Holland. For instance, the partition of the debt was decidedly favourable to Holland. A fair and equal partition of the debt would only have assigned 5,000,000 of florins to Belgium, whereas Belgium now had to pay 8,400,000 florins, for which she was to get this free navigation, and a free route by Maestricht and Sittart. These points, though favourable to Belgium, were not injurious to Holland. He now came to the objections which had been raised by the noble Earl to the proposed cession of [872](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_872%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20872%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c872) part of Luxemburg to Belgium, and he trusted to be able to prove, that no injury was done to the rights of sovereignty belonging to the House of Orange, either in its character of king of Holland, or of Grand Duke of Luxemburg. The noble Lord stated, that there was a difference of 50,000 in the population of the two districts ceded; but there was another difference to counterbalance that excess, and that was, that whereas the parts of Luxemburg ceded to Belgium were barren, the parts of Limburg ceded to Holland were fertile, and even necessary to her defence. The cession of that district of Limburg, by connecting the defences of Holland with Maestricht, would place her in a better military position than she ever was placed in at any former period of her history. He thought that he had now answered satisfactorily the different points to which the noble Lord had adverted. "But," continued the noble Lord, "you have violated the independence of other nations." He was most unwilling to employ force to impose upon other countries terms which they disliked; but that unwillingness must give way before the necessity of preserving the peace of Europe. He had hoped till that night—but after the exciting speech of the noble Lord, he doubted whether he could hope any longer—that to these conditions the king of Holland would have acceded, without any very violent resistance. When these articles were framed, he expected that they would be met by resistance in Belgium—but by none in Holland. In both those respects he had been disappointed. He might not like these articles himself; but necessity sometimes obliged men to adopt measures which they did not altogether approve. Considering the past political life of the noble Lord, he was astonished at the new light which had burst in upon him, and at the new-born zeal with which he stood up in behalf of the independence of nations. He would ask the noble Lord, however, whether he recollected the transfer of Norway to Sweden, and of Saxony to Prussia—that great moral lesson to the king who had assisted the emperor of France, which was followed by a punishment which fell only upon his innocent subjects? He would ask the noble Lord whether he recollected the transfer of Genoa, and the interference of the European Powers—first with Greece, and afterwards with this very government of Belgium? He regretted that there should be any necessity for the use of strong language, but [873](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_873%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20873%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c873) he must be permitted to say, that during these negotiations, which, if they had terminated unfortunately, must have produced a general war throughout Europe, there was no other safe path for the Government to follow, save that in which it had fortunately walked. With respect to the guarantee of the debt under the articles, he would tell the noble Lord how that was. The amount of the article was this—that 8,400,000 florins was to be taken from the debt of Holland and inscribed in the book of the Belgian debt, which from that moment became the debt of Belgium; our guarantee of that article of the treaty was, that it should be so transferred, and we were not in any degree responsible for the payment of it. That was, at least, his construction of the article, and that, he believed, was the construction of every one. He wished their Lordships to consider whether a better arrangement could have been made, and whether it deserved the character which had been ascribed to it by the noble Lord. It had secured to Holland her independence and her station in Europe, without exacting from her any sacrifice incompatible with her interest, or injurious to her honour. She might be encouraged by speeches in that House, and by comments out of that House, to persevere in a course prejudicial to her true interests. Stock-jobbers and speculators in securities, if they could get one farthing per cent on their time bargains, would not scruple to risk the peace of Europe: those persons, by the events of the last war, and by the enormous increase of the debt, had obtained a pernicious influence which might prevent the peace of Europe—an influence which might be described in two lines of the poet— ''Hinc usura vorax, avidumque in tempore fœnus, Et concussa fides, et multis utile bellum. If the negotiations were broken off, and the ratifications were not exchanged, he should be glad if other measures of security could be devised; but in his opinion, there was very little chance that the object in view—the preservation of the general peace—could, by other means, be attained. His object, and the object of all the negotiations, was to obtain a security against war, whilst he endeavoured to preserve the honour of this country, and of all the countries concerned. Their Lordships might decide to-night on a vote of censure upon Ministers, covered by an Address to his Majesty, in order that he might call in other Ministers, and break off the negotiations—for that must be the consequence—negotiations [874](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_874%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20874%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c874) brought so nearly to a satisfactory conclusion. The noble Lord might then have an opportunity of breaking off these negotiations, which he, in conjunction with his colleagues, and with the concurrence of the four great powers of Europe, had endeavoured to conclude, and which he still thought would be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_24%22%20%5Co%20%22Link%20to%20this%20speech%20by%20Sir%20Arthur%20Wellesley) [*The Duke of Wellington*](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/sir-arthur-wellesley)

agreed certainly with his noble friend, that he owed some apology for the vote which he was about to give in favour of the Address; but he must state, that what principally induced him to consent to the present motion being brought forward, was his sense of the injustice done to Holland by the departure from the principles of the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. Holland had been forced to consent to the measures determined on by the Conference of London, without having time or being allowed to consider them. It was upon that ground he rested his justification for requiring that that treaty should now be reconsidered, and he should endeavour to prevail upon the noble Lords opposite to reconsider it themselves. He regretted that that noble Earl, whose whole time and attention must have been engrossed with other subjects, had not been able to give his attention to this particular business, for he believed such facts had never before occurred in negotiations between any two Powers, except on the occasion of the interference of the three Powers between the Turks and Greeks. But the noble Earl said, that the interference with Belgium and Holland was not a mediation. It certainly did not commence in a mediation, but it had terminated in the assumption of an arbitration—the most unjust that ever was known—on the part of the five Powers; and the noble Earl had boasted that he carried their opinions along with him for the conclusion of the treaty. He asserted, that the arbitration was most tyrannical, for the parties were never called on to hear the reasons of the sentence which was passed on them, nor had they any opportunity of making their defence until the sentence had been pronounced to be irrevocable. The noble Earl had spoke of the concurrence of the French government as one of these Powers. He did not know whether that government had concurred in the treaty or not. But if it had been a party to it, it must certainly have changed its views since, for it had declared that it would not hear of the alteration from a mediation to an arbitration. He did not know whe [875](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_875%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20875%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c875) ther they meant that principle to be applied to the Belgians only. He could not suppose that they did not mean that there should be a mediation as respected Belgium, but that the powers of an arbitration should not be employed against the king of the Netherlands. Their Lordships were well aware of the important distinction between the two terms. In February M. Sebastiani said, that the interference of the five Powers was only in the way of mediation, and that the French government could never consent that it should lose that character. But now their Lordships were told that the character of an arbitration was forced upon the Conference. Was it forced upon them by those of the five Powers who had refused to ratify the treaty because it had become an arbitration? or was it they who, as their Lordships were told, carrying the rest of Europe along with them, had forced the Conference to act as arbitrators? He presumed to say, that he had had a long experience in these affairs, and he would assure their Lordships of his sincere belief, that if England was induced to give up Holland, every other Power in Europe would be ready to peck at her. It was on such considerations he grounded the vote which he was about to give. The noble Earl had been pleased to charge the members of the late Government with having prepared the embarrassments in which his Majesty's present Ministers were involved; but why did not the noble Earl prove that? He had often challenged the noble Earl to come forward and prove that any embarrassment felt by the present Administration had been caused by the Government of which he had been a member. He had said before, that the last revolution in France was a visitation upon Europe, for which the late Government of this country was as little to blame as the noble Earl himself, or as any other person at that time in opposition to the Government. He had often said in that House, that there was not an individual in Europe who had less to do with that revolution and with the measures of Prince Polignac than the individual then addressing their Lordships. But if the members of the late Government had nothing to do with that revolution, they had also the satisfaction, the consolation, of reflecting that they had never eulogised it. The noble Earl spoke, as usual, very harshly respecting the settlement of Europe in 1814 and 1815. But the noble Earl ought to remember that that settlement had maintained the peace of Europe ever since, with [876](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_876%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20876%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c876) the exception, which he had always regretted, of the interference between Turkey and Greece. Was not the noble Earl aware that he was, up to the present day, carrying on his negotiations under the arrangements of that settlement. The power which the noble Earl professed to have over the Conference of London was entirely owing to that settlement, of which he so much complained. But the noble Earl said, that the late Administration left him in difficulties. It was they, however, who commenced the settlement of the difference between Belsgium and the king of the Netherlands; and he must express his belief, that the present Ministers found that the other Powers were negotiating (at the time when their predecessors signed the last protocol) with a sincere desire to bring those transactions to a speedy and an amicable conclusion. The late Government did no more than settle the suspension of hostilities, and take an engagement from the two hostile Powers that they would adhere to the suspension. They settled upon a line beyond which neither party should pass; and in the same protocol it was distinctly stated, that the line was determined on only for the purpose of suspending hostilities, and not as the definite separation of one territory from the other. On the 7th November (and it was curious and extraordinary that on that occasion the late Government avoided the error into which the noble Earl opposite fell in ten days after) the late Ministers refused to guarantee the suspension of hostilities; but the noble Earl guaranteed it. Indeed he would not say, that the noble Earl had since made good his guarantee. The late Government refused to make good the suspension, because they knew that if it should be violated it would be necessary to go to war to enforce it, and that then it would be very difficult to determine to what Power the task of its enforcement should be committed. The only way in which the noble Earl had executed the guarantee was by forcing the king of the Netherlands to break up the blockade of the Scheldt; but he had not compelled the Belgians to adhere to the suspension. It was difficult to say to which Power the task of enforcing this engagement should be intrusted. The noble Earl, however, cut the matter short; the guarantee was never enforced against the Belgians, but it was against the king of the Netherlands, by our compelling that sovereign to break up the blockade of the Scheldt. There were no steps taken, on [877](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_877%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20877%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c877) the other hand, to compel the Belgians to adhere to the suspension, and more especially in the neighbourhood of Maestricht. There was one very curious circumstance connected with this guarantee, which he thought well worthy of their Lordships' consideration. On one occasion, in February or March, the suspension of hostilities was to be enforced against the Belgians by a blockade of their ports—and how was this to be done? By neutral Powers. But it must be well known to the noble Lords who signed the protocol, that a neutral Power can have no right to blockade the ports or seize the ships of one of the belligerents. The noble Earl professed to have acted throughout with impartiality. How did the Conference prove this? At the same time that they threatened Belgium with the blockade of her ports by the ships of a neutral Power, they gave notice to the king of the Netherlands that he must, by the 20th of March, break up his blockade of those same ports, or that a fleet would be sent to compel him to do so. Now this was called impartiality; but upon what ground that character was given to it, he was quite at a loss to understand. The next part of those transactions to which he begged the attention of their Lordships, was the declaration of independence. The noble Earl (Grey) stated, that he had always been of opinion that the best arrangement for the peaceful adjustment of the differences between the separated States would be, that the Prince of Orange should become Sovereign of Belgium. But the mischief was, that what the Belgians wanted in the first place was, to have their independence declared by the five Powers; and the first step taken, after the guarantee for the suspension of hostilities, was to make that declaration of independence. This took place on the 20th of December; and on the 9th of January the French Minister (M. Sebastiani) wrote to the Belgian Minister at Paris, expressing great sympathy for the Belgian nation, which long formed part of France, and was still a member of the same great family, and assuring him that the government of France had obtained for Belgium all that it could obtain for her. That the separation from Holland had been brought about by that government, and that the independence of Belgium had thereby been consummated. Such was the construction which the French minister put upon the declaration. Again—in the month of August, M. Meulenere, the secretary of the Belgian government, [878](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_878%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20878%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c878) addressed the Conference in these terms:—'The circumstances under which the sus'pension of hostilities, in November, 1830, 'was proposed by the Conference and ac'cepted by the Belgian government, are 'too well known to require that I should 'recal to your recollection, that Holland, 'seeing her army suddenly disorganised by 'the natural effects of the separation of 'Belgium from her dominions, readily ac'ceded to the suspension; but that Belgium 'might have continued to profit by the state 'of things at that time, and might have 'pushed part of her population out of her 'own limits, and that yet, on the assurance 'that her independence would be acknow'ledged, she acquiesced in the wishes of 'the live Powers, and made her debut in 'the political world by a sacrifice to the 'peace of Europe.' Such was the construction which Belgium put upon the declaration. Such was the result of the noble Earl's negotiations, as far as France and Belgium were concerned. After that came the discussion of what was called the 12th protocol, in reference to which the noble Earl said, that Holland had adopted the basis laid down by the Conference for the settlement of the separation of the two countries, and that the protocol No. 12 did not give her all that she had since obtained north of the Mouse. But on this part of the subject he begged to observe, that that protocol held out to Holland other arrangements (besides the territory upon the Mouse), which were likely to induce her to agree to the basis. According to that basis, Holland was to retain possession, and entire possession, of the Duchy of Luxemburg, and she had every reason to believe that she was to retain possession of the German Encloses, as they are called, and that her territory was to be kept as a continuous line to the north of the Meuse, by other territory to be afterwards conceded to her. This protocol also contained the basis of a settlement of the debt which was satisfactory to Holland; and with respect to that part of the article which referred to the rivers and canals having access into the Rhine, or being connected with that river, there was a letter from the Secretary of State, declaring that that article was intended to refer to nothing but the rivers by which the countries were separated. This basis of arrangement was, therefore, satisfactory to Holland, and was readily accepted. Here it was worthy of remark, that the Conference declared the settlement contained in the twenty-four articles irrevocable. But [879](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_879%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20879%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c879) the noble Earl now told the House, that they had been obliged to depart from that settlement, because an adherence to it would have caused a general war in Europe. On that point he begged leave to contradict the noble Earl; for, after the French government had declared, in the first instance, that they had some doubt respecting that arrangement, they gave a full consent to the whole of it, on the 1st of March, and agreed to carry it into execution; at the same time again declaring its determination to adhere to the mediation, and not to allow any armed intervention on the part of any State in Europe. There was, therefore, no reason for deviating from the settlement which France had adopted, and which was satisfactory to Holland. But it happened, just at that time, that negotiations commenced for the election of Prince Leopold to the Throne of Belgium. The noble Earl (Grey) had said, that the Government of this country had nothing to do with that election. But the noble Earl would allow him (the Duke of Wellington) to refer him to a letter from the noble Lord who was at that time employed in Belgium. From that letter it appeared that one of the objects of the noble Lord's residence in Brussels was to bring about that election; and, for that purpose, he recommended certain arrangements with a view to facilitate the acceptance of that offer by Prince Leopold of Saxe Coburg. The evidence went clearly to show that the election of that Prince was the cause of the abandonment of that settlement which had been accepted by Holland, and which Belgium had refused. He must be permitted to say, that he intended no disrespect to the king of Belgium, on the contrary, he had a great respect for his talents and attainments, and he trusted, that if that Prince would take on him the character of an independent sovereign he would be an excellent king of that country. But then he must be independent, not only of this country, but of France. To prove the interference of our Government, he must further state, that Lord Ponsonby was ordered to state to the Belgian government, that he should leave Brussels on the 1st of June, unless the articles were accepted by that day; but they were not settled, and he departed, and the first thing that was done after his return to London, was the alteration of the basis of the settlement already agreed upon. This was done without consulting the Dutch minister, in consequence of some representation made by Lord Ponsonby to the [880](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_880%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20880%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c880) Conference; and the Belgian government was told, that if they accepted the articles, the Conference was willing to go into negotiations to obtain from Holland the cession of Luxemburg for a valuable consideration—that is, for the cession of an equivalent territory. Now, according to the usual practice of such negotiations, Holland ought to have been consulted. But no such thing. The first that Holland heard of it was by the publication of Lord Ponsonby 's letter. The king of the Netherlands remonstrated, but he was told that, bon-gré mal-gré, he must accept the new settlement. He would not follow the noble Earl in all that he had said respecting the war between Holland and Belgium. That formed no part of the question now under consideration. Holland had great provocation to go to war when she did. He (the Duke of Wellington) differed entirely from the noble Earl on that subject. What he said at the time in that House was, that he never believed that the king of the Netherlands had acted with treachery. The notice which that king gave at the time ought to have been understood differently from the construction which the Conference put upon it, and they ought to have prevented the consequences that followed. Notwithstanding the guarantee, hostilities had never been suspended in the neighbourhood of Maestricht. In the same manner, hostilities were continued in the neighbourhood of Antwerp. Under these circumstances, how had king Leopold acted? Before he left this country, he accepted the eighteen articles. But when he arrived at Brussels he swore to the Constitution, which required that he should take possession of other territory which had belonged to Holland a century back. This hastened the conflict between the two countries, and the dispersion of the Belgian army brought on the French invasion. The noble Earl had asserted, that it had been prophesied that they would not again retire. He certainly could say for himself, that he had never been a party to any such prophecy; he had always asserted when some strong remarks had been made on the speech of the French minister, in which he declared it was the intention of that country to obtain possession of the Belgian fortresses, and to garrison them with French troops, that that speech was nothing in comparison to his signature. He knew that the French troops would evacuate the Belgian territory at the time stated, because he was satisfied [881](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_881%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20881%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c881) that the king of the French would keep his word, and never sanction such a gross breach of faith as to endeavour to keep them there. At that time, however, he had remarked that he understood there were several French officers in Belgium, who were engaged in organizing the people, and this, he had stated, was calculated rather to impede than to promote the independence of that country. This statement had been contradicted at the time, and he was told there was no foundation for such an assertion, but he had since received further proofs that he had been correct, and he now, therefore, repeated, that if there were French officers engaged in the organization of the Belgian army, such a step was not calculated to sustain the national independence of the Belgians. If they were engaged in any other than military service, still their employment at all in that country was most objectionable. He trusted that their Lordships would see in the whole of those transactions something, not only of indiscretion, but of what, in common language, would be called bad faith. He now came to that part of the question which turned on a comparison between the twenty-four articles of October and the guarantee of February respecting the debt. From what the noble Earl had said, he believed that the noble Earl had not had time to attend to those transactions. The noble Earl said, that the guarantee was, that Belgium should pay 8,400,000 florins of the rentes. But, to place that portion of the common debt on such footing, the consent of the creditors must be obtained to take the king of Belgium as a debtor, instead of the king of the Netherlands. That they would not do, without the guarantee of the British Government. But, after all, that was not the arrangement contemplated. The fact was, that the whole remained still the debt of the Dutch government. The interest was to be paid half-yearly in Brussels and Amsterdam. So that there had been no such transfer as the noble Earl supposed. Certainly the noble Earl had no time to attend to these details. If he had, there would doubtless be less reason to complain. But what, then, was the nature of the guarantee? If the Belgians should fail to pay the interest, how was this country bound to Holland? Was each of the five Powers bound to pay one-fifth of the amount, or was Great Britain bound to pay the whole sum in the event of their failure? It was true their Lordships had heard nothing of an Act of Parliament upon the [882](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_882%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20882%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c882) subject, to give the Attorney-General another opportunity of delivering an opinion that the money must be paid. But the King's honour would be bound; and his Majesty would be obliged to come down to Parliament, and say that he had guaranteed the payment, and call on Parliament to enable him to make good his engagement. But the guarantee was not confined alone to the debt: it went much further; it extended to all the details of the navigation of the Rhine and the canals. If all the various questions growing out of these matters were to be settled by negotiation, the Conference of London must be permanent. The noble Earl had been pleased to state, that the arrangements of these twenty-four articles were in strict conformity with the basis agreed to by the king of the Netherlands. He, therefore, must request the noble Earl would inform him where he could find in any part of the basis to which that sovereign had agreed, one word which could give the Belgians the right of passing vessels from the Scheldt to the Rhine? He knew not whether the noble Earl had read the letter from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the ambassador of the king of the Netherlands respecting the article in question; but in that letter the noble Secretary assured the ambassador that the Conference would not deviate from the settlement to which Holland had already agreed. The third article of the Treaty of Separation left the Belgians the free navigation of the rivers which cross the territories of both the States. The ambassador of the Netherlands had waited on the Conference to give the King's adherence to the treaty; and he must have protested against that third article, or the letter would not have been written. But the noble Earl affirmed, that the treaty relating to the navigation of the Rhine secured the navigation also of the rivers and canals connecting the Scheldt with that river. But he could assure the noble Earl that the treaty contained no such provisions. That treaty said, indeed, that the branches of the Rhine, and the rivers flowing into it, should be free to the navigation of the parties to the treaty. But there was not one word in it about the canals. How, then, could the noble Earl say, that the navigation of the Dutch canals was given up by that treaty to the Powers who were parties to it? Even if the king of the Netherlands could be induced to consent to the navigation by the Belgians of the Dutch canals, it must of necessity [883](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_883%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20883%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c883) be on payment of the duties both OH the Rhine and on those canals. It was by England that the demand was originated, he suspected, for the purpose of favouring Belgium; for the purposed arrangement was not to be found in any previous treaty. The general custom throughout Germany was, that the Powers, the territories of which were seated on the banks of a river common to several states, had the management of that part of it which flowed through their country, subject to the payment of tolls which were sometimes regulated by treaty. The King of Holland possessed this common right, and he was bound to provide for the due passage of the river; but the noble Earl insisted upon his sharing a charge, which properly belonged to himself, with the king of the Belgians. He must now advert to the right asserted, on the part of the Belgian commerce, of passing through Maestricht. He contended, that the case was not at all similar to that of the permission granted by Prussia to some of the minor Powers to pass through the Prussian fortresses, to which it had been compared. Independent of the principles proclaimed by the Belgians, when they said, "Belgium must be permitted to plant her flag and proclaim the principles of her independence in the towns and possessions of those opposed to her—we must have a garrison every where." Such a speech as this must, of course, excite attention in Holland; and could their Lordships believe it possible that another State would tolerate a free passage through its fortified places to persons who held such doctrines? And, with respect to the fisheries, although that was of minor importance, yet, still there were rights attached to them in various places through which the different rivers flowed, which ought to be respected, but for which no provision was made to reserve the rights of the king of the Netherlands. It was, therefore, not at all probable that that sovereign would be disposed to acquiesce in such propositions. But, if he were induced to grant these concessions, why was he not to have the benefit of making a Treaty of Commerce from which he would derive all the advantages of them? Let their Lordships consider what Holland had paid for Belgium. By the Treaty of 1814, Belgium was united to Holland; but Holland was to give compensation to Sweden for the cession of certain colonies, and to advance money for the restoration of the fortifications in the Low Countries. For that purpose she had sold four of her [884](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_884%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20884%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c884) colonies. Holland had to pay 1,000,000l. to Sweden, and 2,000,000l. for the Netherland fortifications, in addition to the 1,000,000l. for her share of the contribution of Paris, besides the Russian loan, and other sums, amounting altogether to 7,000,000l. sterling; besides 20,000,000 of francs. Such was the sum which Holland had paid for Belgium; and the compensation which it was now proposed she should receive was 600,000 florins, or about 60,000l. a year. The noble Earl opposite had said, that this arbitrary act had been the only way of avoiding a war. But the whole question was one of justice. Had we a right to do what we had done? So far from avoiding war, in his opinion, the course of conduct pursued in this respect by his Majesty's Ministers was calculated to breed foreign war, as their course of conduct in another respect, was calculated to breed civil war. He called on their Lordships, however, not to be alarmed at the declaration of the noble Earl. The noble Earl allowed that three great Powers hesitated to ratify the treaty; he (the Duke of Wellington) might, he believed, say they were determined not to ratify it, until they had the consent of the king of the Netherlands, who, on his part, never would consent to it in its present form. He had only to add, in conclusion, that he trusted their Lordships would not be deterred from doing their duty on this and other subjects by threats either of foreign or domestic war.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_25%22%20%5Co%20%22Link%20to%20this%20speech%20by%20Mr%20Frederick%20Robinson) [*Viscount Goderich*](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-frederick-robinson)

must say, that he thought the noble Duke who had just sat down had given no answer at all to the powerful speech of his noble friend near him. The noble Earl (Aberdeen) who had brought forward this Motion seemed to think it was a perfectly justifiable one, but yet he had thought it necessary to produce to their Lordships precedents in support of it, supposing naturally enough, that, in the present state of our negotiations with regard to Belgium and Holland, their Lordships might be of opinion that the course which the noble Lord had thought proper to pursue was any thing but justifiable. When, however, the noble Lord went to the reign of Charles 2nd for a precedent, the noble Lord must have selected from that part of our history merely because the matter then in question related to Holland, as the matter now in question did; for assuredly there was no other similarity between the two cases. That which, in the reign of Charles 2nd excited the anger and the indignation of Parliament, was a knowledge [885](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_885%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20885%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c885) of the profligate corruption of the King, who had been bribed by France not only to desert, but to assist in crushing and destroying, our ally, Holland. It was known, too, that the corrupt Ministers of Charles had shared in the bribes of their profligate master; and under these circumstances it was, that the Parliament of Charles 2nd took the measures to which the noble Lord had alluded. He trusted, that even the noble Lord himself would hardly say that the present case and that of Charles 2nd were parallel, so far as the reasons of the course pursued in the two cases were concerned. He would readily admit, however—putting out of consideration the extreme case of Charles 2nd—that a case might occur which would fully justify such a motion as the present; but then, in order to render such a motion justifiable, their Lordships would have, in the first place, to decide that the Ministry had done something which threatened, in its consequences, to compromise the interests of the country, or the dignity of the Crown. Were their Lordships prepared to say, that in the measures hitherto pursued by the Government, so far as their Lordships had received information of those measures, there was any thing which could justify their Lordships in coming to such a conclusion? He thought their Lordships would be far from entertaining such an opinion, which he was sure would be as erroneous a one as ever men entertained. He did not mean, at that late hour of the night, to drag their Lordships once more through all the circumstances of the Belgic revolution; but it would be absolutely necessary to go somewhat back, in order to understand the position in which the Government was placed. The noble Duke (Wellington) had found fault with his noble friend (Earl Grey) for saying that the late Government had provided the present with all the difficulties and embarrassments by which this question was surrounded; but he had heard no such expression fall from his noble friend. He had understood his noble friend to say, that the present Administration had inherited those difficulties and embarrassments from its predecessor. His noble friend had said, "We found them: they are not ours;" and most truly had his noble friend described the manner in which this Government had met with these difficulties. The origin of the troubles of Belgium was, to all appearance slight, and apparently easy to remove. The obnoxious minister might have been dismissed, and the local taxes [886](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_886%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20886%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c886) complained of might have been abolished; but neither was done, and, indeed, scarcely time was given for doing either. One short week entirely changed the character of these troubles. The attack of the Prince of Orange on Brussels might, if it had proved successful, have again turned the tide, and have succeeded in putting down the malcontents. The fact, however, was, that it did not succeed; and that failing, it made matters much worse than they had been before. The subsequent stages of the revolution pressed with a rapidity which was almost unprecedented, and which must have baffled the policy of the most sagacious and the most prudent man. The independence of Belgium was de facto established from the moment in which the Belgian Congress proclaimed and declared that independence; for, from that moment it became evident to every man that the separation between the Belgic provinces and Holland could not be prevented, except by force. In this light it was quite evident that the king of Holland himself viewed the affair; for he did not call upon the other powers to mediate between him and Belgium, but he called upon them to put down the Belgic revolution by force, and so to reduce his revolted subjects to obedience. No one could doubt what the answer of the Powers would be to such an application. They refused to entertain it, and they wisely so refused. The application, therefore, proved no more than that the Dutch clearly perceived that nothing but force could prevent a separation of the Belgic provinces from Holland. He was justified, then, in saying, that the independence of Belgium was de facto established when the present Government came into office,—since nothing short of an universal war, which was not to be thought of, could have prevented its separation from Holland. He would ask, then, whether it would have been wise, even though it had been practicable, to allow matters to remain in that condition? And if not, what could be done?—how could negotiations for the settlement of these troubles be even commenced, without first acknowledging the independence of Belgium. The Government was compelled to choose between acknowledging the independence of Belgium, and entering into a war for the purpose of putting an end to that independence. Such was the necessity under which the Ministers had found themselves compelled to act on coming into office; and if their Lordships admitted the existence of [887](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_887%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20887%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c887) that necessity, it was impossible that they could entertain the Motion of the noble Earl. Their Lordships might have known from the ordinary channels of information what decision the Conference had made upon particular points of the subsequent negotiations; but before their Lordships could fairly judge respecting those decisions, they ought to be in possession of all the facts which had influenced the determinations of the Conference. At present it was impossible to communicate those facts to their Lordships; and in the face of that impossibility, which no one knew better than the noble Lord himself, the noble Earl had brought forward this Motion—a Motion, the object of which was (for it was idle to mince the matter), to condemn the Ministers to perpetual infamy, and to call upon them to give reasons why they should not be so condemned, though the noble Earl was aware that such a call was a mockery, since their tongues were tied, and their public duty prevented them even from stating their case. He did not think it necessary, after the able speech of his noble friend, to trespass further upon their Lordships' attention than just to notice slightly one or two of the objections of the noble Earl (Aberdeen). First, then, the noble Earl had contended, that the article respecting the navigation of the rivers was unjust; but the noble Earl had given no reason for this opinion, and he confessed that he was at a loss to perceive wherein the injustice of the article consisted. The article was, in fact, derived from certain principles laid down and acted upon by the Congress of Vienna. The principles were, as the noble Earl was well aware, at variance with the old maxims of the law of nations; and the object of them was, not to prevent collision, but to facilitate commerce, and to make nations less strangers to each other than they were before. These were, he admitted, very wide principles, but not more wide than wise, although in direct opposition to the principles of the noble Earl (Aberdeen), whose argument was, that the rivers should be shut up, in order that commerce might be obstructed, and nations made more strangers to each other than they had ever been before. Now, it had never occurred to any one in the Conference, nor to many probably out of it, that the opening of these waters would be injurious to the interests of Holland. Indeed, the Dutch themselves had not made this discovery till it was of use to them as a pretext for not agreeing to the terms proposed [888](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_888%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20888%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c888) by the Allied Powers. They did not object to it in the memoir, though he believed they did in the note which had been sent to the Conference; but then that objection was of a different character to that of the noble Lord. They said, that it was unheard of, that the duties and tolls, &c. should be regulated by the common consent of other Powers. Now, this he begged leave to deny. It was not unheard of. A treaty was signed on the 29th of May, 1815, between Prussia and Hanover, respecting the navigation of the Ems; and an article of that treaty said, that the duties on Prussian and on Hanoverian ships should be the same; but it said, also, that the two Powers should, of common accord, settle what the amount of those duties should be. He thought, therefore, that the Dutch had made more of this article than it was worth, and he had shown that they were wrong in their facts when they talked of such a regulation being unheard of. It would not be difficult for him to show, that the greater part of the noble Earl's objections were as unsubstantial as this respecting the navigation of the rivers; but he felt that at so late an hour he had already trespassed too far upon their Lordships' attention. Although nothing could exceed the vehemence, not to say violence, of the imputations which the noble Earl had cast upon the Government, he must be allowed to tell the noble Earl that, as far as his own conscience was concerned, he felt perfectly easy under these imputations, knowing them to be utterly destitute even of the shadow of foundation. He called upon the House to go to the vote with this recollection, that if—and he solemnly declared the fact was so—the Government had conducted these negotiations from the commencement to the end with the most strict and scrupulous attention to the honour and the interests of the country, no motion could be more uncalled for, and unjustifiable, than the present; and that while, on the one hand, the noble Earl had made out no case which ought to lead their Lordships to suspect for a moment that the conduct of Government had not been of that character, so, on the other hand, a sense of public duty precluded the Government from making public those facts which were essential to the complete justification of their conduct.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_26%22%20%5Co%20%22Link%20to%20this%20speech%20by%20Mr%20George%20Hamilton-Gordon) [*The Earl of Aberdeen*](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-george-hamilton-gordon-3)

begged to assure the House, that there were but one or two points to which he was desirous to allude, and, that he would do so as briefly as possible. Now that he had learned from the [889](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_889%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20889%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c889) noble Earl (Grey) what the noble Earl meant by a guarantee, he was not at all surprised, that the noble Earl had entered into a guarantee of such a nature as that which he had described. Now that he knew how the noble Earl understood his engagements, he should not be surprised at any engagement the noble Earl had made, or might make. The noble Earl had told them, that all they would be called to do, under this guarantee, was to see the amount of the debt transferred from one great book into another great book, but the words of the treaty were—'And the payment of the 'sum above mentioned, of 8,400,000 florins, 'shall take place regularly every six 'months either at Brussels or Antwerp, in 'hard money, without any deduction of 'whatsoever nature it may be, either at 'present or in future.' Surely the noble Earl could hardly have read the treaty which contained these words, but if he had really read it, and yet so understood the guarantee, then he might, with equal safety, guarantee even the course of the winds and the waves. But let the treaty be agreed to, and he would defy the performance of it, because, to perform it would be found impossible. With reference to the division of the debt, the noble Earl had said, that he considered the portion assigned to Belgium as an ample portion, and, that such division was only the developement of the old engagement. Now by the old engagement, the portion taken by Belgium, was 14,000,000 florins, and by the new engagement it was 8,400,000 florins; so that if this were a developement at all, it was a developement of a very odd character—a developement by means of contraction. According to the opinion of the members of the Conference themselves, the Dutch had a right to expect, that upwards of 10,000,000, at least, of the debt, would be charged to Belgium. The noble Earl had, in the first place, denied, that any unnecessary intervention had been had resource to, and then he said, that violence had been resorted to, from necessity, to induce the Dutch government to yield. If the House was to be told, that this prince objects to this king, and that potentate to the other, and if every power was to have a veto in the nomination of a sovereign, a pretty sort of independent State must be the result. If foreign powers arrogated to themselves to choose or exclude particular individuals from the sovereignty of a State, what became of that undoubted power which the noble Earl contended was [890](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium%22%20%5Cl%20%22column_890%22%20%5Co%20%22Col.%20890%20%E2%80%94%20HL%20Deb%2026%20January%201832%20vol%209%20c890) inherent in any nation to choose its own government. He would beg to add one word more in reference to the remark made by the noble Viscount (Goderich) who had said, that the navigation of rivers was occasionally regulated by a convention between those sovereigns through whose territories they flowed, and had instanced Prussia and Hanover with regard to the Ems. No doubt, two interested parties could regulate such matters as were common to themselves, and, therefore, they ought to have left this right to be settled between Holland and Belgium themselves; the complaint was, that a third party had arbitrarily stepped in and insisted upon the navigation of rivers without consulting either party, and against the especial interest of one of them. His great objection to this treaty, however, was—apart from the injustice of it—that it would render war unavoidable. However great might be the noble Earl's desire to preserve peace, he would too soon find that this treaty would force him into a war. In spite of what had fallen from the noble Lords opposite, he must contend that the late Administration left to its successors no other than very light embarrassments in regard to our foreign relations; and he had always looked upon a greater probability of war as one of the almost inevitable results of the retirement of the noble Duke near him from his Majesty's councils. That illustrious man had, by his abilities, his experience, and his reputation, been enabled to inspire our allies with confidence, and to strike fear into the hearts of our enemies; and those feelings in the bosoms both of our friends and our foes were never higher than at the moment the noble Duke quitted office. The noble Lord had taunted him with the separation of Saxony, and affirmed, that he (the Earl of Aberdeen) had no reason to complain of the separation of Luxemburg; but he must again and again declare, that he considered the projected division of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg as the forcible spoliation of the territories of an old ally. The noble Earl had told him to look at Genoa, and Sardinia, and Saxony; but those were conquered countries, to be dealt with as the conquerors pleased. These instances furnished no justification of the present, which was the robbery of our friend and ally.

[§](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1832/jan/26/belgium#S3V0009P0_18320126_HOL_27) The House divided on the Motion. Not content, Present 59; Proxies 73, 132; Content, Present 39; Proxies 56–95; Majority for Ministers—37.