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Belgium-US: The Belgians are pushing strongly for favorable resolution of two bilateral issues, at least one of which could have political repercussions.

Foreign Minister Harmel, in handing over an aide memoire on 8 January concerning the request of Sabena airlines for landing rights at Chicago, told the ambassador that the matter was of great political interest to him. Harmel appeared intimately familiar with the details surrounding last year's grant of this right to the Dutch competitor, KLM, and also referred to the recent similar grant to the Greek Olympic airline.

Harmel implicitly admitted that Belgium lacked a concession to give in exchange for this right, but said that he would find it difficult to explain the situation to parliament and the public. The aide memoire warned that Belgium might have to re-examine its aeronautical cooperation with the US.

The other issue involves a representative of a Belgian bank who was arrested in China in July 1968. The Belgian Government is convinced that it cannot obtain the release of this man unless a solution is found to the problem posed by the blockage in the US since 1951 of certain Belgian bank funds earmarked for the Bank of China.

A second aide memoire handed to the ambassador the same day suggests that the Belgian bank may be able to raise the necessary funds independently if the US will agree [redacted] not to dispose of the blocked account in any way other than to ultimately restore it to the Belgian bank. [redacted]

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