

Representing the EPTU to a Wider Public – Stamps Commemorating the Union’s Foundation

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The European Postal and Telecommunications Union could not only be experienced by users through sending mail but also by buying stamps. At least in four countries, Germany, Norway, Slovakia and the Netherlands, this was possible. Not all of the participating administrations commemorated the occasion by emitting a stamp. This might not only be due to lacking will but to missing available funds. Special stamps cost money and all of administrations were on a tight budget because of the ongoing war.

The German postal administration emitted three different stamps – two of them depicted the postman on horseback that was also the symbol of the congress. One stamp also had light coming from above while on the other one the postman was above a globe. The third stamp showed a postman blowing his horn in front of a map of Europe. The motifs of the stamps contained the lettering: European postal congress.¹ These stamps all reflect some form of hegemony – the postmen are bigger than Europe and the globe respectively. They also bear witness to the new start for European postal relations that the EPTU was supposed to bring according to its founders. This can be seen by the light from above on one of the stamps. The connection to postal services was made clear through the postman and the horn –very common and more importantly neutral symbols. The aim of the stamp was not to celebrate German hegemony in the new postal Europe.

The Norwegian postal administration published one stamp in two different colours on the same day the German administration did: 12th of October 1942 – which was the starting date of the congress. This means that it was not the congress but rather than the newly founded European postal union that was supposed to be commemorated. The motif of the stamp was

1 Michel® Deutschland 2019/2020 2019, p. 167.

divided into two sections: one that showed the head of Vidkun Quisling², the other one showed a lion with a double-paw. The first one was the exact motif of the last stamp emitted in Norway and the other one was a replica of the first ever Norwegian stamp (however, a mistake was made and the replica was not exact which cause great discussions among philatelists). The frame around the two sections read “12th October – European Postal Union Vienna 1942”.³ Given the fact that the agreements to create the union were not yet signed at this date, it can be said that the Norwegian administration appeared to have been very sure that they would be. Apart from the lettering, this motif has little to do with Europe or a postal union and has to be interpreted before the national background and Quisling’s attempt to legitimate himself as the leader of Norway. The bringing together of the first and the last Norwegian stamp emitted was probably supposed to signify continuity. Vidkun Quisling was the one politician that would give Norway a new place in the “New Europe”.

The stamp that the Slovakian administration emitted in three colours to commemorate the foundation of the EPTU combined “international” elements in the form of a series of coat of armours starting in the left bottom corner with flags of the Germany and Italy at the beginning. Not all flags are visible, thus one has to assume that the other countries’ flags follow. The date of the congress, the Stephan’s Dome in Vienna and carrier pigeon with a petal of linden in its beak in the forefront of the stamp completed the motif⁴. A “normal” user of the stamp would have to draw the connection to the EPTU with the help of the indications date, place, pigeon for postal services and the flags of the countries of the member administrations – which appears quite challenging. In contrast to the other administrations, the Slovakian administration chose to use a very political symbol, namely the flag, for the stamp. The connection to postal services appears to be rather weak compared to the stamps from Germany and the Netherlands. As it was the case regarding the Norwegian stamp, it seems as though the stamp rather puts Slovakia in the context of a “New Europe” at the side of Germany and Italy.

The Dutch administration only released its stamp in January of 1943. The stamp’s motif consisted of the lettering “European PTT union – 19th

2 National-Socialist Minister President of Norway at the time.

3 Riksarkivet, Oslo, Postens sentralledelse, Fa-008, 309-310 Postforening.

4 Michel® Europa 2018. Band 1 2018, pp. 555 – 556.

October 1942” and a post horn in the background as well as the words “Netherlands”.⁵ This stamp is relatively simple and makes a clear connection to postal services. The fact that the post horn is only seen in the background actually leads to a focus on the lettering that announces the union.

The four administrations emitted stamps that are quite different – the motifs were not coordinated between them and thus highlight other aspects, most probably due to the national audience that needed to be served. In the 1920s and 1930s, the wish for a European postal union had often been connected to a common stamp that would give the peoples of Europe a feeling of belonging together⁶. It is thus noteworthy that the member administrations of the EPTU did not emit one common stamp and that the creation of one postal area within Europe was not also used to create one common stamp or to publish one collection at the same date in order to establish some sort of transnational audience. In fact, the idea to have one common stamp was discussed within the German *Reichspostministerium* but rejected due to financial and technical difficulties.⁷ This points to the fact that one common stamp would have maybe been too symbolic. It would have attested a deeper unification than the administrations intended. The question of one common European stamp reappeared very quickly after the war and was answered with the so called “Europe stamps”: Here, a same motif was emitted from 1958 until 1973 by the participating administrations. However, they were only valid nationally.⁸

References

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5 Michel® Europa 2017/2018. Band 6 2017, p. 1228.

6 Laborie, Léonard: “Enveloping Europe. Plans and Practices in Postal Governance, 1929 – 1959“, in: *Contemporary European History* 27 (2) (2018), pp. 301 – 325. DOI: 10.1017/S0960777318000085, p. 305.

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