

General Conclusion

Although it is counterintuitive, the first European postal union was created through an initiative driven by the Axis powers under National Socialist leadership. The EPTU's creation was only possible because several elements came together, including a desire to continue cooperation by PTT experts, early territorial wins by Germany and Italy at the beginning of the Second World War and Germany's (and Italy's) goal of establishing policy hegemony over the European continent. The war can thus be understood as a catalyst for the institutionalisation of European technocratic PTT cooperation. The war resulted in a union with standards that were largely adapted from the German postal system and went further than what had been achieved by the UPU before or after the war or by the CEPT or OCSC. This work retraced the context which made possible the union and its preparation, implementation and operation. Finally, it illustrated that the idea of and necessity for a European postal union continued beyond the Second World War. Numerous initiatives in the Western bloc failed prior to the establishment of the CEPT, which occurred relatively quickly after the OCSC was created in the Eastern bloc. Here also a war – albeit a cold one – influenced the institutionalisation of cooperation. Though the CEPT and OCSC were different organisations, their structures and standards were relatively similar.

This work began by contextualising the EPTU and retracing the various developments that shaped it. The decades-long history of international cooperation between national PTT administrations in the UPU provided a clearly defined set of common goals and values of the administration experts consisting mainly of the conviction that communication should be as borderless as possible. Overcoming national borders was easier when rationality dominated and politics were left out of the technical discussions. Regarding the governance of postal services, the experts aimed at technocracy. Schot and Lagendijk summarised these ideas in the term 'technocratic internationalism'. Decades of working together gave them a certain set of tools for cooperation such as congresses, committees and sub-committees which functioned as sites to discuss the harmonisation of international postal services. Standards were continuously developed and reviewed with the aim of facilitating and lowering the costs for users of international postal services as much as possible. As such, international

postal cooperation was shaped by fixed traditions and a specific habitus when the war began; these included the general depiction of the German Postmaster General Heinrich von Stephan as the founding father of the UPU. This representation gave the *Reichspost* a reference point and legitimisation for the project of a European postal union.

Moreover, the call for a European postal union was not new and had already been intensively discussed during the interwar period. It was integrated into the Briand Plan for a federal European Union but failed due to the PTT administrations' aversion to ties with political projects. The Axis powers did not have a similar European political project either alone or together. Instead, the term 'New Europe' was drawn from German propaganda to describe the reconstruction of Europe according to National Socialist ideals after the war was won. Because Hitler did not propose a clearly defined vision, this propaganda was based on a conglomerate of different ideas that, in a German context, always ended with German hegemony over the continent. It remains open to debate whether this ambiguity was due to a lack of interest, strategy or leadership. However, this lack of a clear concept of a 'New Europe' does not mean that the international sphere was not important to Fascists or National Socialists. Despite their ideological hatred of international organisations, they understood their importance. The vagueness of the term 'New Europe' also allowed different actors to develop concrete projects that could be tied to it, thus legitimising the idea of a future Europe in Germany. Therefore, while the EPTU was rhetorically connected to the 'New Europe', this had little actual meaning as the ideal could not be translated into concrete actions or consequences, giving the administration room for a presentation of the project as purely technocratic. It was purely used as a talking point to legitimise the project politically.

The standardisation was divided using a simple policy cycle model consisting of initiation, decision and working phases. The initiation phase included the steps of draft development, problem formulation, information collection and agenda setting. The decision phase consisted of resolving content issues as well as finding compromises and gaining consensus. As its name implies, this phase was decisive in the adoption or rejection of a policy. The working phase included the implementation of the decisions made in the previous phase as well as their further development. These phases could not always be clearly delineated. For instance, many important decisions were made during the initiation phase in the case of the EPTU as the majority of standards agreed upon later were fixed in this phase. If one

follows the model strictly, these decisions should only be made in the decision phase.

While it remains unclear who or what initially began the process of creating a European postal union during a world war, it can be said that two different projects developed almost simultaneously. Italian and German telecommunications experts met to discuss the idea of establishing a working group to continue cooperation amidst paralysed international organisations. Within the *Reichspostministerium*, a Foreign Department was created by *Reichspostminister* Ohnesorge, who was put in charge of creating a European postal union. The department was headed by Friedrich Risch, who was supported in the area of postal services by Friedrich Reiss. The plans developed within this department were later implemented, though not all the initial aims were achieved. Three out of the ten aims can be seen as realised: the harmonisation of European postal services on the German schedule of tariffs, the abolition of the transit charge for land mail, and German leadership in the EPTU. On the basis of these original plans, the *Reichspost* contacted the Italian PTT administration to make the EPTU a reality. Hence, the EPTU was an Axis initiative and project. At the same time, the *Reichspost* contacted other European PTT administrations to enquire about their position on the plans. The *Reichspost* had established a system of appointees abroad tasked with maintaining positive relations with the national PTT administration in order to simplify cooperation. These relationships were to be fostered via other channels as well, such as a committee within the ICL. The *Reichspost's* strategy was to conclude bilateral agreements with these administrations which would be blueprints for the standards agreed upon within the EPTU.

The negotiations between the German and Italian administrations led to a bilateral agreement in October 1941; this was the starting point for other bilateral agreements that followed. However, for technical reasons, the German-Italian agreement was the least far-reaching of all the bilateral agreements. The Italian postal system differed from the German one and could not be easily adapted. Nonetheless, this discrepancy between the Axis partners was a clear theme throughout the development of the EPTU and cannot be explained by technical issues alone. Indeed, the Italian Foreign Ministry was bothered by the inequality between the two administrations and halted the project by forcing the cancellation of a meeting between the German, Italian, Hungarian and Danish PTT administrations. The inequality between the powers stemmed from the *Reichspost's* goal of pushing through standards to institutionalise German dominance in PTT affairs. This aim was evident in the initial choice of location for the union

office (Berlin), the proposal of German as the only official language, the *Reichsmark* becoming the new reference currency and German insistence on abolishing the transit charge for land mail, which the Italian PTT administration did not fully support. That said, neither the Italian nor German Foreign Ministries were invested in specifically postal questions. However, when it came to organisational standards such as language provisions, they were highly involved. The German Foreign Ministry was also adamant that the EPTU agreement would only be inter-administrative and not a state treaty. Despite the tensions between the two Axis partners, preparations continued to advance.

From October 1941 to August 1942, the *Reichspost* negotiated nine additional bilateral agreements with the national PTT administrations of Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania and Slovakia. All these administrations would later join the EPTU. The agreements were constructed according to modularity, and the wording of different modules was exactly the same in all the agreements. Most importantly, the agreements allowed the *Reichspost* to export its weight system for letters with the respective German domestic tariffs to the other country's postal services with Germany. The agreements also represented the first opportunity to abolish the transit charge for land mail. Some administrations agreed to this quickly (the Dutch, Norwegian and Slovakian administrations); others agreed to it in a re-negotiation of the agreement (the Danish and Finnish administrations); others agreed to a 50% reduction of the tariff (the Bulgarian, Croatian and Hungarian administrations), and two administrations did not agree to the abolition at all (the Italian and Romanian administrations). Thus, half the administrations bilaterally agreed to the abolition. The arguments against the abolition were mainly financial as the transit charge was an important source of income for the administrations. The tariffs were also an important point of discussion during the congress in October 1942. The national administrations with which the *Reichspost* did not sign bilateral agreements, but which later became part of the EPTU, were Albania and San Marino, which is logical given their dependence on Italy. The Italian administration also played a role in the following with regard to the bilateral agreements, while the *Reichspost* led the process.

The *Reichspost* took charge of contacting other potential member administrations including Belgium, France, Greece, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden and Turkey. While the Spanish, Swiss and Turkish administrations did not sign bilateral agreements, they accepted the invitation to the congress and participated as observers. The Portuguese

administration did not answer at all, while the Swedish postal administration declined the invitation. Swedish telecommunication experts were disinvited as a result. The Belgian head of telecommunications declined the invitation as well, causing the Belgian head of postal services to be disinvited. Although the German Foreign Ministry and the *Reichspost* had initially agreed to invite the French, Greek and Serbian administrations as observers of the congress, the invitations were ultimately withdrawn. In the case of the occupied territories in this group, the question of who would participate and who would not was discussed repeatedly and changed. This aspect was especially important to the German Foreign Ministry, which did not intervene in the setting of postal standards. From a technocratic viewpoint, the more administrations that joined the union, the more the union would be effective due to economy of scale. More members would also increase the union's legitimacy. From a foreign policy viewpoint, this decision was part of a larger context. What role would France play in the 'New Europe'? Which territories would be included or even annexed in a potential Greater Germanic Reich? The fact that the German leadership had no answers to these questions is reflected in this back-and-forth discussion regarding the list of participating administrations.

Finally, the PTT administrations from 17 European countries gathered in Vienna in October 1942; 14 of them would later be founding members of the EPTU. All administrations could submit specific proposals for standards, but this was only done by the Italian and German administrations. These proposals were not negotiated during this congress as the congress was focussed on deciding organisational standards. The only concrete postal standards agreed upon – the abolition of the transit charge and the adoption of the German weight system for European postal services – were German priorities. The preparatory drafts discussed during this congress were all provided by the German administration, which had discussed them beforehand with the Italian administration. Nevertheless, German was proposed as the only official language. Italian was added during the congress, but it is surprising that this source of conflict was not resolved beforehand given the tensions before the congress; this again demonstrates that the Axis powers did not have a united front, and national aspirations for hegemony continued to complicate cooperation. In summary, the organisational standards were mostly adopted as proposed. The standards were derived from longstanding international cooperation standards and thus were quickly accepted. The major change was that the official languages. In this respect, the geopolitical situation was also used to disempower France.

Concerning specific postal standards, the postal committee created during the congress agreed on new tariffs and an administrative-operative standard. The latter does not need to be addressed here. Regarding the new tariffs, the export of the German domestic weight system to the postal services between members was finalised. Even the Italian administration agreed to this system after initially stating that it was unsure whether this would be possible. The new basic tariffs were the German domestic tariffs in *Reichsmark*. When converted into the other national currencies, the tariffs agreed upon in the bilateral agreements were used. Similarly, the abolition of the transit charge for land mail was agreed upon after the Italian administration changed its position from opposition to approval. The Croatian administration negotiated an exemption from these new standards for one year. For the other members, the agreements of the congress went into force on 1 April 1943. These decisions represented a great success for the *Reichspost* not only because they significantly lowered the prices of postal services between the countries but also because they manifested German hegemony and power. These two standards had been the cornerstones of the German campaign regarding postal services within the EPTU, and they had been agreed upon during the congress in October 1942 in Vienna. With the enforcement of the agreement in April 1943, an important portion of Europe began using the German weight system and the *Reichsmark* as a reference currency. Additionally, the abolition of the transit charge for land mail represented a major step in establishing a unified postal area. In effect, land borders between countries were erased for letters and postcards. The only trace of bitterness was that a significant number of administrations, including the Italian, could only sign with reservation; they still needed their governments' approvals for the agreements, and consequently the new standards, to be implemented. Over the course of the following months, all governments approved the agreement, assuring their entry into force at the beginning of April 1943.

Meanwhile, the German administration had signed a bilateral agreement with the Belgian postal administration. As a result, German postal services were the centre of the EPTU's postal area. This was due to the fact that the bilateral agreements consisted of greater simplifications and lower prices regarding aspects of postal services (such as journals and packages) beyond letters and postcards. These provisions were agreed to bilaterally but not multilaterally. As Croatia and Romania were scheduled to implement the provisions in 1944, the unity of the postal area was graded according to the respective national state of implementation of the EPTU agreement.

After the successes during the initiation and decision phases, the working phase proved to be the moment when the war caught up with the EPTU. Regarding standard-setting, this meant that there were more and more cases in which the PTT administrations did not want or could not negotiate a common standard. The other two scenarios of the coordination problem, namely everyone wants the same standard or everyone wants a standard but not the same one, occurred less frequently. This is particularly visible at the 1943 postal committee conference, where many issues were postponed, and there was little agreement. Germany's relationship with Italy fully deteriorated during this time due to Italian military losses. The Axis partners thus became even more unequal. The Hungarian and Danish postal administrations, particularly the Hungarian von Forster, became more important, as reflected in the dynamics of the 1942 congress. While there was still a postal committee conference in June 1943, the congress envisioned for Rome in October 1943 had to be postponed, a planned congress in Vienna in 1944 to which the *Reichspost* still invited the member administrations had to be cancelled. Some administrations even accepted the invitation to the planned congress in Vienna. It is difficult to explain why the EPTU continued, and not just with the German administration, after the loss of Stalingrad at the beginning of 1943. Some acted out of ideological conviction, and it is possible that some did not realise that this was the beginning of the end. From the German administration's viewpoint, giving up may not have been an option. There may also have been hope that the technocratic and non-political aspects of the EPTU would somehow allow the organisation and its postal standards to survive. From the perspective of an occupied country, even if the war was lost, the German occupier could still do substantial harm but could be appeased by continued cooperation. Whatever the reasons for its continued operation after 1943, the organisation itself did not survive the war, but its basic ideas were taken up again.

In the working phase itself, few standards were agreed upon. Most proposals had to be delayed until a more convenient time. With the exception of one recommendation regarding insufficiently franked mail, the standards decided upon were never implemented because the congress that would have approved them never took place. With regard to tariffs, it was decided that the German domestic system for letters would be applied to letters heavier than 1,000g. The same applied to printed materials, mail in braille, business papers, samples and mixed mailing, even though the tariffs agreed upon were higher than the domestic German tariffs. During the working phase, the *Reichspost* did not negotiate any confirmed new

accessions to the EPTU. It remains unclear whether the French administration finally applied the provisions of the EPTU agreements without actually joining the union. The French administration was the focus of German efforts to enlarge the union largely due to its expertise; the presumption that the Spanish administration would have been more likely to join if France was part of the EPTU also played a role.

The preparation and the founding of the EPTU were accompanied by promotional efforts by the *Reichspost* via articles in newspapers and specialist journals as well as stamps. All these efforts express the fact that the political aspects of the EPTU were cleanly separated from the technocratic aspects. The latter were more emphasised, especially in the presentation of the project to a professional audience, potentially out of a desire to legitimise the project as much as possible. There seems to have been no coordinated effort by the Axis powers or the other PTT administrations to promote the EPTU. While four administrations issued stamps on the occasion of the founding of the union – with the notable exception of the Italian administration – these stamps appear to have been placed in a specific national context. Without explanation or lettering, none of them had an obvious connection to the EPTU. Their quantity also does not indicate that they reached a wide national audience, let alone an international one.

Though the EPTU ended, the idea of a European postal union and its technocratic necessity survived the war; this is evident in that discussions towards building another union were quickly revived. The result was not one but two restricted PTT unions that included European countries, the CEPT (Western bloc) and the OCSC (Eastern bloc). The division was a consequence of the Cold War. In the Western bloc, several attempts to create a European postal union failed because they were attached to a political project for European unification (the ECSC, ECC and CoE). The CEPT, which was completely detached from any political organisation, was ultimately founded in 1959, shortly after the socialist states created the OCSC in 1957. The history of the emergence of the EPTU and the strong hegemony of the *Reichspost* more closely mirror the history of the OCSC and the Soviet administration's domination of its organisational process. A similarly leading administration cannot be detected in the case of the CEPT. The organisational standards of the EPTU were partially close to those of the CEPT and OCSC, which underlines technocratic continuity despite regime changes during the war. Like the EPTU, both organisations combined postal services and telecommunications, which was not the case on the level of global organisations. However, some standards such as

membership provisions became more political. The OCSC accepted only administrations from socialist countries. The main aim of the EPTU, the CEPT and the OCSC was the same: facilitating communication. This meant that the contents of standardisation were similar to the ones in the EPTU in the beginning. Some standards became political: preferential tariffs for ECC members were supported by the German Foreign Ministry while the *Bundespostministerium* was hesitant. During the EPTU, the German Foreign Ministry was not involved in negotiating or implementing such specific postal standards. Stamps remained a main tool for promoting international postal cooperation. In this respect, the continuities are in some ways evident. The number of copies of a stamp does not indicate that a national or international audience was reached, and it is unlikely that the meaning of the stamps and their connection to the PTT organisations would have been easily understood. In the Western bloc, the countries of the ECSC started the 'Europe stamp' series in 1956, and the CEPT took it over in 1959. This change caused the stamps to become even less political or connected to an idea of a unified Europe. In the series, the administrations issued stamps with the same motif, which had not been the case in 1942. The OCSC did not create such a stamp series, and the first stamps in 1958 varied greatly in design. In 1965, the administrations apparently agreed to portray the heads of Marx and Lenin but not to connect the stamp to the conference of the PTT administrations. The actors involved in the CEPT and OCSC were mostly individuals with no traceable connection to the EPTU, with three exceptions: Friedrich Reiss, who was head of the department for international mail within the *Bundespostministerium*; Kristjan Johannes Jensen, who was Director General of the Danish PTT administration in 1942 and 1959; and Simbri Ahola, who was Director General of the Finnish PTT administration during the war. Otherwise, the discontinuities clearly outweigh the continuities.

In conclusion, the EPTU demonstrates that the war did not per se cause a rupture in European postal cooperation. Although there were discontinuities in the inter- and post-war periods, the basic organisational and administrative-operative standards were continued in new organisations, and discussions of tariffs proceeded. The major issues of the EPTU, including conflicts between the Italian and German partners, were due to (geo)political and financial rather than technocratic reasons. The *Reichspost* took advantage of the fact that in this specific case of infrastructure integration, technocratic and political aspects overlapped. It profited from the ambiguous conceptualisation of the 'New Europe' to gain support for its European project, even though the lack of clarity on the issue

of Europe also presented hindrances from time to time. The EPTU was thus – in contrast to the term ‘New Europe’ – not at all ambiguous but instead serves as an important example of how concrete structures evolved to build the ‘New Europe’ independently of precise political guidelines. The EPTU’s founding and development also indicates that the implementation of the idea of a ‘New Europe’ was often realised through the installation of a German Europe by actors within the *Reichspost*, at least in the case of postal services. The *Reichspost* utilised the benefits of German hegemony over the continent to export aspects of the domestic German postal system to the rest of Europe. However, this does not mean that the standards did not make sense from a technocratic point of view, as the assessment of Swiss congress delegate Ernest Bonjour has shown. Rather, it means that the ‘New Europe’ of postal services, if standardisation had continued in this way, would have been a German Europe because the other European administrations would have harmonised their postal systems with Germany’s. If Germany had won the war, the EPTU would have guaranteed the *Reichspost* a significant amount of control over European postal services and thus increased Germany’s influence within the UPU. The momentum of the early territorial wins of the *Wehrmacht* was used to launch an Axis initiative to create the first European postal union with 13 other European PTT administrations. It can therefore be said that without the Second World War, the EPTU would not have existed. This may represent another continuity between the CEPT and the OCSC, the creation of which was highly influenced by the Cold War.