Inland Navigation Infrastructures and the Second World War: The Example of the Rhine Region

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1. Introduction

The period from 1914 to 1945 has long been considered a hiatus in the history of European integration. Recent research, however, has highlighted the importance of this period for the integration of infrastructures in Europe.[1] 1945 was by no means a „Stunde Null" or „Hour Zero" for European integration history: the Council of Europe, the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community formed part of a continuity of European integration that can be traced back to the 19th century. In this context, the period framed by the two world wars plays a major role.

Between 1914 and 1945, the integration of Europe was subject to intensive public debates. Well-known European integration projects such as those promoted by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi[2] and Aristide Briand[3]

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1 Kaiser, Wolfram / Schot, Johan: *Writing the Rules for Europe. Experts, Cartels, and International Organisations*, New York 2014, p. 179 – 218.

2 Conze, Vanessa: *Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi. Umstrittener Visionär Europas*, Gleichen/Zürich 2004; Ziegerhofer-Prettenthaler, Anita: *Botschafter Europas.*

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were only two of many that fuelled the debate. During the Second World War, both sides discussed various ideas for the integration of Europe. While Adolf Hitler strongly opposed any commitment to integration, some National Socialists and Italian fascists drafted plans for post-war European integration.[4] Various resistance movements also developed their own projects for the unification of Europe.[5] In addition to these political concepts, technical internationalism was a major driver of integration during the entire period. Wolfram Kaiser and Johan Schot have argued that the First World War created early building blocks for European integration, as it led to a combination of technocratic internationalism with a European rhetoric.[6] From 1916, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Italy established several international committees of experts in order to improve the cooperation of the *Entente* under the conditions of the war economy. The most famous was the Allied Maritime Transport Committee based in London under the leadership of Arthur Salter and Jean Monnet. Its main task was to pool the member countries' resources to ensure maximum efficiency of maritime transport. Important elements of the organisation became the blueprint for the European Coal and Steel Community established in 1952. After the First World War, technocratic cooperation at an international level continued in the sectors of rail, post and telecommunication. Even in the middle of the Second World War, in 1942, Italy and Germany created the *Europäischer Post- und Fernmeldeverein* (European Postal and Telecommunication Union) to facilitate trans-border communication.

Richard Nikolaus Coudenhove-Kalergi und die Paneuropa-Bewegung in den zwanziger und dreißiger Jahren, Vienna 2004.

3 Kießling, Friedrich: *Der Briand-Plan von 1929/30. Europa als Ordnungsvorstellung in den internationalen Beziehungen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert, in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte*, 2008, www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-1457; Fleury, Antoine (ed.): *Der Briand-Plan eines europäischen Bündnissystems. Nationale und transnationale Perspektiven, mit Dokumenten*, Bern 1998.

4 Neulen, Werner: *Europa und das 3. Reich. Einigungsbestrebungen im deutschen Machtbereich 1939 – 1945*, Munich 1987; Bloch, Charles: *Le IIIe Reich et le monde*, nouvelle édition revue et augmentée d'une préface, Paris 2015; Freymond, Jean: *Le Troisième Reich et la réorganisation de l'Europe 1940 – 1942. Origines et projets*, Leiden 1974.

5 Dumoulin, Michel (ed.): *Plans Des Temps De Guerre Pour L'Europe D'après-guerre*, Bruxelles 1995.

6 Kaiser / Schot: Writing the Rules of Europe, p. 59/60.

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In this article, I will focus on transnational internationalism in relation to the river Rhine during the Second World War. The Rhine was – and still is – the backbone of western European inland navigation and therefore an important part of the transport infrastructure. In recent years, historians have begun to research in more depth how the political organisation of the navigation on the Rhine developed over time.[7] The most important body, founded in 1815 and still existing today, was the Central Commission for the Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR). Two remarkable aspects of this organisation stand out: the CCNR was the world's first ever international organisation with elements of supranationality – i. e. the transfer of national sovereignty to an international body. It was also the institutional framework for legal, administrative and technical standardisation that became the blueprint for other river commissions worldwide. Economic historians have focused on the Rhine in the 19th and 20th centuries. Their approaches aim to explore the long-term transnational developments in the Rhine region from Rotterdam to Basel. Today, the Rhineland is one of the leading economic centres of Western Europe. This is without doubt due to the economic significance of the river as a transport infrastructure.[8]

In this contribution, I will examine the transnational administration of the Rhine as a waterway during the Second World War. How did the military and political conflicts during the 1930s and 1940s impact on inland navigation? What was the role of national governments, international organisations and private shipping companies? To what extent was the war a hiatus in the history of transnational cooperation on the Rhine, or was there also some continuity? To answer these questions, I will first concen-

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7 Woerling, Jean Marie / Schirmann, Sylvain / Libera, Martial (eds.): *Commission Centrale pour la Navigation du Rhin. 200 ans d´histoire 1815 – 2015*, Strasbourg 2015; Tölle, Isabel: *Europäische Integration der Rheinschifffahrt Mitte des 19. und Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts im Vergleich*, Baden-Baden 2016; Thiemeyer, Guido / Tölle, Isabel: „Supranationalität im 19. Jahrhundert? Die Beispiele der Zentralkommission für die Rheinschifffahrt und des Octroivertrages 1804 – 1832", in: *Journal of European Integration History* 17 (2011), p. 177 – 196.

8 Boon, Marten / Klemann, Hein / Wubs, Ben (eds.): *Transnational Regions in Historical Perspective*, London/New York 2020; Banken, Ralf / Wubs, Ben (eds.): *The Rhine. A Transnational Economic History*, Baden-Baden 2017; Klemann, Hein / Wubs, Ben: „River Dependence. Creating a transnational Rhine Economy, 1850 – 2000", in: Hesse, Jan Otmar / Kleinschmidt, Christian / Reckendrees, Alfred / Stokes, Ray (eds.): *Perspectives on European Economic and Social History*, Baden-Baden 2014, p. 219 – 245.

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trate on the political cooperation in the Rhine region between 1936 and 1940. This period is of particular importance, because the political confrontation surrounding the Rhine navigation was triggered as early as 1936, when Nazi Germany decided to leave the Central Commission for the Navigation on the Rhine. Then I will move on to the war years: when the Franco-German *Phoney War* started in September 1939, the Upper Rhine was blocked by mines, and bridges were destroyed to prevent both armies from attacking. After the first battles had been fought in the spring of 1940, the infrastructure of the inland navigation in the Rhine area was quickly rebuilt and served again as an important transport artery. Between 1940 and 1945, the Rhine region was governed by the German leadership. Late in 1944, during the advance of the Allied forces in Western Europe, the frontline moved back to the Rhine and the infrastructure was severely hit by the fighting. Finally, I will discuss the organisation of the navigation on the Rhine after the Second World War.

In my considerations, I will look beyond the river to the entire Rhine region and its network of rivers and canals created with the Rhine as its backbone. Any technical and administrative standards produced for the Rhine applied to the whole system. The ports of Rotterdam, Antwerp, Duisburg and to a certain extent also Strasbourg and Basel were the most important intermodal junctions of the network.

2. Dissolution of the CCNR and Cartelization in the 1930s

The Treaty of Versailles had a major impact on the navigation in the Rhine region, first and foremost due to the fundamental political changes in the CCNR.[9] The first major change was that Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Italy all joined the CCNR. Until then, membership had been restricted to riparian states. The addition of the new members now led to a Europeanization of the Rhine. Second, the presidency that until 1919 had been assigned by lot to a member state was now permanently given to the French delegation. Third, the CCNR headquarters were

9 Thiemeyer, Guido: „Die Zentralkommission für die Rheinschifffahrt und der Vertrag von Versailles“, in: Schirmann, Sylvain / Libera, Martial (eds.): *La Commission centrale pour la navigation du Rhin. Histoire d´une organisation internationale*, Paris 2017, pp. 103 – 119.

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transferred from Mannheim in Germany to the French city of Strasbourg. These changes were enforced by the Treaty of Versailles, which was heavily influenced by the French desire to control Germany. Both the German and the Dutch governments were highly critical of these changes. The Germans were enraged by the French dominance in inland navigation on the Rhine. The Dutch, who had not been involved in the negotiations in Paris, rejected the changes because they feared a politicisation of inland navigation in Europe in general and on the Rhine in particular.[10]

However, the changes concerning the CCNR introduced by the Treaty of Versailles were only provisional arrangements. Art. 354 stipulated that „within a maximum period of six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty, the Central Commission […] shall meet to draw up a project of revision of the Convention of Mannheim". The revision of the Convention of Mannheim turned out to be highly complicated. Deliberations started in February 1921 and soon were hampered by the political turmoil of the Ruhr occupation in 1923. While some progress was made between 1924 and 1928, a new convention for the navigation on the Rhine was difficult to reach. The French intended to strengthen the supranational authority of the CCNR, whereas the Netherlands and Germany attempted to make it an intergovernmental organisation. From 1929, the German delegation refused to accept any compromise in this respect. Another major problem was the rivalry between the Belgian port of Antwerp, supported by the French government, and the Dutch port of Rotterdam. In the context of the appeasement policy in the mid-1930s, the French government accepted the German demands to weaken the CCNR's supranational competencies (in particular concerning jurisdiction) and both governments agreed a *modus vivendi* that would serve as the basis for the navigation on the Rhine. The agreement of the *modus vivendi* was a diplomatic success for the German Reich, because most of the provisional regulations stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles were now revised.

To the surprise of all member countries, the German government resigned from the treaty in November 1936. Files from German archives reveal the background of this decision.[11] On 13th October 1936, the German

10 Woehrling, Jean-Marie / Schirmann, Sylvain / Libera, Martial (eds.): *Central commission for the navigation of the Rhine 1815 – 2015. 200 years of history*, Strasbourg 2015.

11 Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PAAA), Berlin, R124077, German note dated 14.11.1936.

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delegate to the CCNR, Georg Martius, informed the administrative leader of the Reich Chancellery, Heinrich Lammers, about the *modus vivendi* agreement to have it signed by Adolf Hitler. The „Führer" was not interested in inland navigation, but he rejected the CCNR as a symbol of French hegemony and the system of Versailles. Hitler therefore instructed his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Konstantin von Neurath, to leave the international organisation. Experts from the *Auswärtiges Amt* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the *Reichsverkehrsministerium* (Reich Ministry of Transport) attempted to convince Hitler that leaving the CCNR was not in the interest of German inland navigation. However, Hitler was obviously not interested in economic cooperation in inland navigation and insisted on his decision to leave. Germany's exit (followed by Italy a few weeks later) was a purely political decision and an affront to the international legal system of the interwar period. From today's perspective, it can be seen as a step towards preparation for war.

Despite Nazi Germany's political blockade of inland navigation on the Rhine, the transnational administration of the waterway continued. One example of this are the traffic regulations agreed in the summer of 1938. Negotiations on these regulations had been launched in 1932 following a German initiative.[12] The German government's original aim was a common standard for traffic rules on all European inland waterways. The negotiations were held within the CCNR and, in September 1936, the delegates agreed a first draft of the common traffic regulations. This draft, however, was called into question when the Nazi government withdrew from the CCNR in November 1936. Only minor debates about some details still needed resolving. German shipping companies urged the government in Berlin to find a solution, because German industries depended on the transport infrastructure of the Rhine. In July 1937, the German government took the initiative again by sending a diplomatic memorandum to the CCNR's member states, inviting the respective governments to negotiations on common traffic regulations.[13] All governments accepted and, in September 1937, new negotiations started in Düsseldorf. Each state was represented by its commissioner to the CCNR, except for Germany.

12 Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA), R5/430 Revision der Rheinschiffahrtspolizeiordnung.

13 BA R5/436 Reichsverkehrsministerium, Akten betreffend Revision der Rheinschiffahrtspolizeiordnung, Auswärtiges Amt to the embassies in Paris, Bern, Brussels, The Hague, 30.7.1937.

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Georg Martius, the former delegate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the CCNR, had been replaced by Galinsky, head of the Rheinstrombauverwaltung in Koblenz. The delegates of France, Switzerland and Belgium began their speeches with a protest against the German withdrawal from the Commission. The Swiss delegate Herold stressed that his government accepted the invitation, but insisted the final decision on the common traffic rules must be made by the CCNR. An agreement on common rules for the navigation on the Rhine was in the interest of the Swiss economy, and this was the only reason why Switzerland participated in the deliberations. Herold stressed the fundamental conflict between his country and Germany concerning the CCNR's position. From his point of view, the results of the deliberations in Düsseldorf should only have provisional character. This position was supported by the French and Belgian delegations, both represented by their commissioners to the CCNR. In a second meeting that took place in Cologne in January 1938, the riparian countries' delegates finally agreed common traffic rules on the Rhine and the other European waterways.

According to the Swiss, French and Dutch governments, the agreement had to be approved by the CCNR. To this end, the CCNR scheduled a special meeting in Paris in August 1938.[14] In his opening remarks, the CCNR's French President, Gout, stressed that the provisions agreed in Cologne corresponded to the draft from 1936, with only minor changes. Therefore, in his view, the CCNR could accept the agreement without any reservations. This was true, but Schlingemann, the Dutch commissioner, pointed out an important legal difference: for the CCNR, the rules were common rules legally established by its own authority. Nazi Germany, by contrast, insisted that these were German rules that had been accepted by the other riparian states of the Rhine. In a diplomatic note on 3rd August 1938 the German government therefore stated that the regulations agreed in Cologne would come into force for the German part of the Rhine on 1st January 1939.

The close German-Dutch cooperation in the political sector was continued in the economic field. Working closely together, the Dutch and German Shipping companies and their lobby organisations complemented the cooperation in the administrative sector. In October 1937, two shipping

14 Commission Centrale pour la navigation du Rhin. 1938 Session extraordinaire, Protocole 2, Paris 24.8.1938, p. 3/4.

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associations – the German "Schifferbetriebsverband für den Rhein" and its Dutch counterpart, the "Nederlandse Particuliere-Rijnvaart Centrale" – signed an agreement on close cooperation in the distribution of transportation charges.[15] Members of both organisations were now obliged to record all requests for transport on the Rhine in registration offices. All transport was to be distributed equally and appropriately among the organisation's members. In fact, this was a transnational cartel organising the bilateral transport in inland navigation. The Dutch-German cooperation was driven by two underlying motives: the first was that the treaty was the result of a growing interdependence between the Netherlands and the two German regions of the Rhineland and Westphalia. Despite Germany's withdrawal from the CCNR and the lack of any other political agreements, the chambers of commerce in the Rhineland and in Rotterdam were closely connected. On the occasion of the third international Port Day in Rotterdam in September 1937, the port administration invited the mayor of Cologne, Karl Georg Schmidt, to give a speech. Schmidt emphasised the close transnational cooperation between both regions. For the Rhine-Ruhr region, the industrial heartland of the German Reich, the Rhine was the most important infrastructure and connection to the international port of Rotterdam. From a Dutch perspective, the Rhine was the main artery for the export of agricultural products from the Netherlands to Germany. The second motive was that, in the 1930s, inland navigation was in deep crisis. In the wake of the world economic depression, the demand for transport had slumped at the beginning of the decade. Shipping companies suffered from an oversupply of transport in navigation. This situation was made worse by the growing competition from railways in the Rhine region. However, while inland navigation was dominated by (small) privately owned enterprises, railway companies (national monopolies) were run by the state, which gave them a major competitive advantage. Private shipping companies attempted to overcome this disadvantage by creating cartels, first on a national level and later with international agreements.

This example highlights two different aspects: on the one hand, diplomatic relations in the Rhine area deteriorated in 1936, partly due to the Wehrmacht's illegal occupation of the Rhineland. For European inland navigation, however, the Reich's withdrawal from the CCNR had even

15 „Engere Zusammenarbeit zwischen holländischer und deutscher Partikulierschiffahrt", in: *Deutsche Bergwerkszeitung*, Düsseldorf, 6.10.1939.

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more important consequences. It led to an increasing shift of power back to the regions and to a rejection of transnational governance in inland navigation by the German government. On the other hand, mainly for economic reasons, Germany had a vested interest in a common agreement and was therefore dependent on the cooperation of the other governments – whether within the CCNR or not. The policy of appeasement in the mid-1930s led the French and Dutch governments to accept the German approach to the distribution of power in inland navigation. In the diplomatic note mentioned above, however, the German government stated, „that the traffic regulations agreed must not be modified unilaterally by one state, but only with the agreement of all others".[16] At the same time, economic actors such as private shipping companies and chambers of commerce intensified their transnational cooperation.

3. During the War: The "German" Rhine

With the German invasion of France, Belgium and the Netherlands in May 1940, the Rhine area became a battlefield. Important parts of the infrastructure were destroyed by both the German and Allied forces. In the Netherlands, 1.800 km (1.118 miles) of waterways became unusable, because damaged bridges and sunk vessels blocked the traffic.[17] After the surrender of the Dutch army on 15th May 1940, the reconstruction of transport infrastructures became paramount for the German army. The Wehrmacht needed a permanent and continual supply of coal and weapons from the Reich. In close cooperation with the Dutch waterways administration (Rijkswaterstaat), Germany embarked on a rapid reconstruction programme. Only a few days after the fighting had ended, the Rhine between the Ruhr area and the Netherlands was again fit for navigation. The whole waterways system in the Netherlands was re-established in only three months.

Along with this, the German occupiers reorganised the administration of inland waterways in the Netherlands. In May 1940, Nazi Germany ap-

16 Note verbal transmise par l´ambassade de l´Allemagne à Paris au Ministère des Affaires Etrangères de France, 3.8.1938, in: Commission Centrale pour la navigation du Rhin. 1938 Session extraordinaire, Protocole 2, Paris 24.8.1938, p. 9.

17 BA R5/10015, Organisationsfragen der niederländischen Binnenschifffahrt. (March 1943)

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pointed Arthur Seyß-Inquart as „Reichskommissar" for the Occupied Netherlands and created a special department for inland navigation headed by a commissioner („Kommissar für See- und Binnenschiffahrt"). In the 1920s, Dutch inland navigation had been controlled by many different associations of ship owners competing on the transport market.[18] In May 1933, a new law created a „freight commission" tasked with distributing transport demand among the various companies. The transnational cooperation between the German and Dutch cartels intensified in 1937 due to the agreement mentioned above. Only a few days after the occupation of the Netherlands, the German administration gave the order to dissolve the existing cartels and establish a „Vereniging Centraal Bureau voor de Rijnen Binnenvaart" as an umbrella organisation for all shipping companies and the „Particuliere", owner-operators of one single vessel. All ship owners and shipping companies were now obliged to join the „Centraal Bureau", which organised the transport on the Rhine. It was led by the Dutch Ministry of Waterways under German control. The Dutch Rhine navigation was therefore integrated into a pool, with membership compulsory for all ship owners and companies. While cartels of shipping companies and „Particuliere" existed in the Netherlands before 1940, membership had been voluntary. The reorganisation in 1940 integrated Dutch inland navigation into the German system. In the Reich, the cartel was organised on a national level by the „Reichsverkehrsgruppe Binnenschiffahrt" in a regional substructure for the Rhine, the „Transportzentrale Rheinschiffahrt" founded in January 1941 in Duisburg.[19] While its responsibilities were originally restricted to German territory, it immediately claimed authority over the entire transport system of the Rhine.[20] The Dutch shipping companies largely accepted German procedures, mainly for two reasons: ship owners still vividly remembered the severe crisis of the early 1930s and demanded stronger political and organisational support for inland navigation on the Rhine. Nazi Germany's occupation of the Netherlands generated a rising demand for transport due to the Wehrmacht's military supply

18 Ibid.

19 „Transportzentrale der Rheinschiffahrt. Zusammensetzung und Arbeitsweise", in: *Deutsche Verkehrs- Nachrichten*, 30.12.1940.

20 BA R5/684 Akten betr. die wirtschaftliche Lage der Rheinschiffahrt. Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Arbeitsausschusses der Transportzentrale der Rheinschiffahrt am 11.2.1941 in Duisburg.

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needs and the increased transportation of food from the Netherlands to Germany.

In Belgium, the situation in inland navigation was similar. Most of the infrastructure had been destroyed in the spring of 1940. Re-establishing the system took about a year. The Albert Canal between Antwerp and Liège was reopened in January 1941 and the Canal de Louvain in October 1941. The most important challenge, however, was the lack of ships in Belgium. Many were destroyed during the fighting in May 1940. At the same time, many Belgian ship owners fled with their vessels from the German Wehrmacht into the South of France. After the occupation, the demand for ship transport boomed and could not be satisfied by the remaining Belgian transport capacity.[21] Similar to the Netherlands, the Belgian inland navigation system was now harnessed for German needs. It was now overseen by the German Ministry of Transport in close cooperation with the body responsible for German military transport in Belgium, the „Wehrmachtsverkehrsdirektion Brüssel". The powerful „Reichsverkehrsgruppe Binnenschiffahrt", the lobby organisation of German inland navigation in the Rhine region, also exerted considerable influence. As in the Netherlands and in Germany, Belgian shipping companies were now obliged to join a transport pool created in September 1940. The „Belgische Binnenvaart Centrale" had a similar role to the Dutch „Centraal Bureau". It was controlled by both the German military administration for Belgium and the „Reichsverkehrsgruppe Binnenschiffahrt" in Berlin. The Wehrmacht, the Ministry of Transport and the „Reichsverkehrsgruppe Binnenschiffahrt" quickly clashed over their responsibilities.[22]

German regional actors in the Rhineland immediately sought to integrate the Belgian transport system into the German network. After military action ended in the summer of 1940, it was again Karl Georg Schmidt, the mayor of Cologne, who took the initiative to connect the Belgian economy with the Rhineland.[23] He advocated the construction of a canal from Ant-

21 BA R5/10015, Belgien – Wieder leistungsfähige Binnenschiffahrt, 16.2.1942.

22 See for instance the report of the delegate of the Ministry of Transport who complained in Berlin about the dominant role of the Reichsverkehrsgruppe Binnenschiffahrt in Belgium. BA R5/71 Akten betr. die Organisation der Binnenschiffahrt in Belgien 1943 – 1944. Verkehrsdirektion Brüssel an Reichsverkehrsminister Berlin, 29.9.1943.

23 BA R5/291, Niederschrift. Besprechung über den Rhein-Maas-Schelde-Kanal im Reichsverkehrsministerium am 25. Oktober 1940.

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werp to Cologne, a project that had been discussed previously, but never realised. In a meeting between the German Minister of Transport, Julius Dorpmüller, and representatives of the Rhine region in Berlin in October 1940, Schmidt argued for a rapid construction of the canal. Dorpmüller recognised that a closer connection of the Belgian territory to the Reich would require new transport infrastructures after the war. He therefore approved of the initiative in principle, although he was convinced that the canal could only be constructed after the war. A large majority of Belgian ship owners supported the German inland navigation initiatives. Like their Dutch counterparts, they greatly profited from the rising demand for transport after the crisis in the 1930s.

The situation on the Upper Rhine was different.[24] During the invasion in May 1940, several major bridges were destroyed and blocked the port of Strasbourg, which had been significantly enlarged by the French government after 1919. In the interwar period, the French had planned to develop Strasbourg into the most important port on the Upper Rhine to create an intermodal junction for inland navigation and rail transport. The war had interrupted the port's connection with the railway infrastructures in France and Germany. Germany took almost a year to rebuild the port of Strasbourg. In addition, the Upper Rhine was blocked by a series of pontoon bridges constructed by the Wehrmacht in the spring of 1940 to secure troop supply in France. The pontoons effectively also blockaded the ships docked in the port of Basel, which left them immobilised. From early 1941, however, the port of Strasbourg regained its position as the main junction for the transport of coal and other commodities to Switzerland and Italy.[25]

The inland navigation infrastructure of the Rhine was quickly integrated into the German system for two reasons: German policy on the Rhine was supported by the Dutch, Belgian and Swiss administrations. The „Centraal Bureau" and the „Binnenvaart Centrale" collaborated closely with the German authorities. While they were subjected to the control of the Wehrmacht and the German administration, they voluntarily accepted the German rule. Closely connected with this first point is that the influential

24 BA R5/684 Vol. 1, Der Oberpräsident der Rheinprovinz an den Reichsverkehrsminister, Bericht über die Reise an den Oberrhein, 6.8.1940.

25 Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Archives Diplomatiques, Relations Commerciales Vichy, 17GMII/76.

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shipping companies and their organisations supported the German dominance on the Rhine. Under wartime conditions, the navigation on the Rhine boomed and all the shipping companies were essential to meet the demand for transport services. For them, it was a stroke of luck as their sector had been in deep economic crisis in the 1920s and 1930s. Inland navigation had suffered from the competition of other modes of transport, namely road and rail. By contrast, since the outbreak of the war, transport capacities were badly needed and the shipping companies eagerly met the increasing German demand.

Under these circumstances, the CCNR became obsolete. Its archives and library had been transferred to Grenoble in November 1939 to protect them against possible war damage. In September 1940, the German Armistice Commission („Waffenstillstandskommission") in Wiesbaden asked the Vichy government to transfer the archives back to Strasbourg. The German authorities prohibited any further meetings of the CCNR, except one to decide its dissolution.[26] Its function was now assumed by the German authorities.

The system worked well until the autumn of 1944. When the allied troops reached the German border, they intensified their attacks on the country's infrastructure in order to prepare for the invasion. Once more, the Rhine became a combat zone. Allied planes attacked the ships on the river and German troops attempted to destroy the bridges to prevent the Americans and the British from crossing the river. In the autumn of 1944, Swiss shipping companies therefore tried to withdraw their vessels from the German Rhine to protect them from destruction. The German Secret Service („Sicherheitspolizei") considered this as a betrayal of Germany and responded by blocking Swiss ships on the German Rhine.[27] Nazi dominance over the river diminished and could only be maintained by military force.

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26 Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Archives Diplomatiques, Relations Commerciales Vichy, 17GMII/76. Note pour M. de Botsanger, 23.9.1943.

27 BA R5/303 Fol 1, Schnellbrief Auswärtiges Amt (Martius) to Reichssicherheitshauptamt, 30.8.1944.

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4. After the War

After the German Wehrmacht's unconditional surrender in May 1945, the infrastructure of the Rhine region and the surrounding waterways lay again in ruins.[28] Considering the amount of damage, it is astonishing how quickly the river infrastructure was rebuilt. In the summer of 1945, the navigation between Rotterdam and Basel resumed despite obstacles including pontoon bridges in major cities and the wreckage of bridges and sunken ships in the water.

After resolving more practical issues such as clearing the obstacles and rebuilding the river infrastructure, the difficult decision on how to organise inland navigation after the period of Nazi hegemony on the Rhine had to be addressed. The CCNR had never been formally dissolved, but became inactive during the war. The first question was whether it should be restored. While the former member states quickly agreed to reinstate the CCNR, it was more difficult to decide what legal basis it should have. The Treaty of Versailles had profoundly changed its institutional structure, and the *modus vivendi* agreement of 1936 had introduced another reform. Finally, the Western Allies agreed a compromise. The Convention of Mannheim of 1868 was reinstated, with the exception that Switzerland and Belgium, which had not been members in the 19th century, were now included into the CCNR. France, the United Kingdom and the United States represented Germany, because their occupation zones bordered the Rhine. After the Federal Republic of Germany was founded in 1949, it was accepted as a member state and the United Kingdom and the United States left the commission. Compared with the political turmoil of the interwar period, the political cooperation between the riparian states of the Rhine now ran more smoothly.

After the surge in demand for transport facilities on the Rhine during the war, the market slumped after 1945. Shipping companies found themselves in a similar position to the 1920s and early 1930s. There was an oversupply of ships in the Rhine region, causing severe competition. In the 1930s, shipping companies had created pools in order to set standard prices for the transport of various commodities on a national level. During the war, these cartels had been reorganised under the leadership of the Ger-

28 Zentralkommission für die Rheinschifffahrt (ed.): *200 Jahre Geschichte*, Strasbourg 2015, p. 158.

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man authorities with considerable influence from the lobby group. The idea of these cartels was revived in 1953, when the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Rheinschiffahrt" was founded in the Federal Republic of Germany.[29] As previously, the main task of this association was the distribution of transport commodities between the different shipping companies in order to avoid competition. The major difference was that the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Rheinschiffahrt" was a transnational organisation, while the cartels of the 1920s were organised only at the national level. The "Arbeitsgemeinschaft" was therefore to some extent a continuation of the cooperation between "Vereniging Centraal Bureau voor de Rijn- en Binnenvaart" and the "Reichsverkehrsgruppe Binnenschiffahrt" during the war and was strongly supported by national governments. While the Federal Ministry of Transport ("Bundesverkehrsministerium") was sceptical about the cooperation between German and Dutch shipping companies, the *Auswärtiges Amt* encouraged shipping companies to share capacities. The idea behind this decision was to avoid any conflict between German, Belgian and Dutch companies during the negotiations for a European Political Community and the European Defence Community. The close cooperation of shipping companies between the Netherlands and West Germany was now put under the auspices of European integration.

The end of the war therefore had an ambivalent impact on the infrastructure of inland navigation: on the one hand, the CCNR was restored and apart from minor changes resembled the form it had in the 19th century, while the changes imposed by the Treaty of Versailles and the *modus vivendi* were abandoned; on the other hand, the close relationship between national governments and lobby groups initiated in the interwar period and intensified during the war continued as before.

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29 Tölle, Isabel: *Integration von Infrastrukturen in Europa im historischen Vergleich, Bd. 6: Binnenschifffahrt (Rheinschifffahrt)*, Baden-Baden 2016, p. 207 – 223; Thiemeyer, Guido: „Integration und Standardisierung in der internationalen Rheinschifffahrt nach 1945", in: Ambrosius, Gerold / Henrich-Franke, Christian / Neutsch, Cornelius / Thiemeyer, Guido (eds.): *Standardisierung und Integration europäischer Verkehrsinfrastruktur in historischer Perspektive*, Baden-Baden 2009, p. 137 – 153.

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5. Conclusion

Without any doubt, the Second World War was a major hiatus for the history of the navigation on the Rhine. Political conflicts started in 1919 with the Treaty of Versailles and deteriorated in the early 1930s, when the CCNR failed to agree a new common convention for the Rhine. The *modus vivendi* agreement of 1936 was a Franco-German compromise that the Netherlands never accepted. The next decisive development occurred in November 1936 when Nazi Germany (and in its wake Italy) decided to leave the CCNR for political reasons. While the CCNR succeeded in drafting new traffic regulations and in resolving other technical issues in 1938, Germany now was the hegemon on the Rhine. The other riparian states accepted German dominance mainly for economic reasons. The Rhine was the backbone of Western European inland navigation and no government wanted to disrupt commercial interests because of political debates. The acceptance of German hegemony in the Rhine navigation also fitted comfortably into the general policy of appeasement. When German troops invaded Northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands in 1940, the entire navigable Rhine region (except for a small area in Basel) fell under direct German control. Although never dissolved, the CCNR became inactive and new standards were now set unilaterally by the German authorities. However, Germany left the traffic rules and other standards concerning the Rhine largely unchanged. Hence, there was a continuity in terms of technical, legal and administrative standards in the navigation on the Rhine, even though the institutional system changed completely.

In 1940, the CCNR only held two meetings in The Hague and Lausanne. By now, Nazi Germany had assumed complete control over the Rhine. Different institutions were involved in the administration of river traffic, in which the Wehrmacht assumed a major role. The German army needed a permanent supply line and dominated the transport on the river. Military needs were paramount during the entire war. Despite this, the Rhine system was formally under the supervision of the department of inland navigation in the Reich Ministry of Traffic in Berlin. In the Netherlands, the Wehrmacht closely collaborated with the German civil administration in The Hague. The Reichskommissar for the Occupied Netherlands Seyß-Inquart established a commissioner for waterways („Wasserstraßenbeauftragter") who, in turn, worked closely with the Dutch Ministry of Waterways. By contrast, the administration of the Belgian waterways was entrusted to the „Hauptverkehrsdirektion Brüssel", a sub-

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department of the military administration in Belgium that was also responsible for Northern France.

It is interesting to see the pivotal role of cartels in inland navigation between 1936 and 1945. Shipping companies established these cartels in response to the severe economic crisis of inland navigation in the Rhine area. Their main objective was the distribution of transport orders among different companies to avoid cut-throat competition in inland navigation. The cartels were first created at the national level, but soon expanded across borders. In most cases, they were closely connected with the respective Ministries of Transport. During the Second World War, the German authorities supported the cartels, because they expected them to organise shipping transport more efficiently. In 1953, they were again supported by the Foreign Ministries of the Netherlands and Germany, because they were considered as vital to further the political integration of both countries into the European Coal and Steel Community. The organisation of transnational cartels is striking, because they are the most important factor of continuity in this whole period, formed to combat an economic crisis in the sector that emerged in the 1930s, continued during the war and reappeared in the early 1950s.

It is also important to point out that – in contrast to post and telecommunication – Germany had no plans to establish an international organisation for the navigation on the Rhine during the war. Since 1936, the Nazi government in Berlin circumvented the CCNR politically, although the German administration continued to cooperate with the other governments until 1940 via the „Strombauverwaltung Koblenz". After Germany's invasion of Western Europe, the Nazis considered the Rhine as a German river.

It is worth noting that most of the shipping companies supported the German hegemony in the navigation on the Rhine during the war. The main reason was that transport on the river increased significantly because of military needs. The transport boom greatly benefitted the shipping companies in the Rhine area that still remembered the deep crisis and the oversupply of transport capacities in the 1930s.

In contrast to the post and telecommunication sectors, there was little or no talk of „Europe" in inland navigation on the Rhine during the war. This is astonishing, because the notion of „Europe" was growing in the CCNR both in the interwar period and after 1945. Although the Reich had no „European policy" apart from German hegemony based on military power during the Second World War, many German officials attempted to pro-

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mote a „New Europe" on different occasions – but this was never the case in the Rhine area.

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