



A replacement for the Universal Postal Union? The European Postal and Telecommunications Union of 1942 and its relations to the UPU

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The Second World War considerably restricted the work of the Universal Postal Union – Congresses and further work on standardization were out of the question. Against this background, the European Postal and Telecommunications Union (EPTU) was founded following a German–Italian initiative in Vienna in October 1942. With 13 member administrations from countries occupied by or depending on the Axis, the union covered a considerable part of the European continent and was intended to organize postal relations and standards in Europe after a war won by the Fascists and National Socialists. The German intention was to harmonize standards with the German ones in order to create a single European postal area without transit fees and national borders. The extent to which a technocratic approach could be maintained differed from standard to standard. Nevertheless, Swiss observers noted that the Swiss administrations could not remain outside this organization for long, if it continued to exist, as the benefits for its users were assessed favourably.

At the time as well as now, this begs the question: what role was foreseen for the EPTU within the UPU, or was it even supposed to be the new UPU? According to Madeleine Herren, the National Socialists had three ways of dealing with international organizations: close, undercut or replace.¹ The EPTU was meant to work in a post-war “New Europe”; it was supposed to be a basis for an empire but not an instrument for the war itself. Officially, the EPTU was created as a regional organization within the UPU, as allowed by article 5 of the UPU Convention. The German postal administration, which glorified Heinrich von Stephan as the founder of the UPU, underscored that point. The EPTU was also not the first regional union. The South American Postal Union, for example, had been founded more than two decades earlier. Yet, statements in German newspapers concerning the non-functioning of the UPU as well as assessments from contemporaries led to doubts whether it was entirely intended to remain a regional union or whether it was supposed to compete with the UPU. The presence of a Japanese delegation at the founding congress in Vienna hints at the global outlook of the EPTU. These questions are all the more relevant as the *Reichspost* did not sign the UPU Convention negotiated at the UPU Congress in 1939 in Buenos Aires – owing to political issues and at the command of Hitler. How much did this decision influence the creation of the EPTU?

After exploration of the history of the EPTU and with a discussion of continuities and discontinuities with the inter- and post-war time, the presentation will analyze the question on the basis of archival material. It will do so by contextualizing the UPU within the international organization building of the National Socialists and Fascists.

¹ Herren, Madeleine: Fascist Internationalism, in: Sluga, Glenda, Clavin, Patricia (Eds.): *Internationalisms. A twentieth-century history*. Cambridge, United Kingdom 2017, pp. 191–212, p. 208.