



The Central European Postal Union: debates around global postal unification following the collapse of Austria-Hungary (1918–1929)

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Even before the Universal Postal Union was founded in 1874, the German-Austro-Hungarian postal agreement of 1872 had created a single postal territory in Central Europe. From its beginning, the Universal Postal Union encouraged its members to conclude postal agreements to facilitate their postal relations and lower postal tariffs. As the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was collapsing at the end of World War I, the process of “postal separation”, which led to the creation of new national postal administrations in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland, and the protectionist policies of the successor states contributed to the deterioration of postal relations in Central Europe.

Following the signature of the peace treaties, the obsolete German-Austro-Hungarian postal agreement was replaced by several postal agreements: the successor states of Austria-Hungary concluded postal agreements at the Portorose Conference in 1921, which facilitated, to some extent, cross-border postal relations in Central Europe. Nevertheless, the situation was far from “satisfactory” for the Hungarian economist Elemér Hantos, who advocated for the creation of a Central European Postal Union, based on the model of the German-Austro-Hungarian postal agreement, to simplify and facilitate postal relations by lowering and standardizing postal rates and by introducing a Central European postage stamp. The Central European Postal Union, conceived by Elemér Hantos, included not only the successor states of Austria-Hungary, but also Germany. It was part of his broader plan of a Central European Economic Community, meant to mitigate the negative consequences of the economic disintegration of Austria-Hungary.

In the second half of the 1920s, Elemér Hantos promoted the idea of a Central European Postal Union in the debates of the Central European Economic Conference. From September 1925, this transnational organization, based in Vienna, brought together economists, businessmen and politicians, mostly from Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Germany, to discuss the modalities of economic rapprochement in Central Europe. At the end of the second Central European Economic Conference, dedicated to issues related to transport and communications, which took place in Vienna in October 1926, the participants endorsed the resolutions formulated by Elemér Hantos, aiming at the creation of a Central European Postal Union within the framework of the Universal Postal Union.

At the same conference, the German delegate Georg Gothein stated that, while waiting for the introduction of the international postage stamp promised by the Universal Postal Union, the European states should form a European Postal Union to improve postal relations in Europe, and advocated for the introduction of a European postage stamp. During the same week, the regionalization of the Universal Postal Union was also discussed at the first Paneuropean Congress, organized in Vienna by Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi.