



Origins of the European Postal Union: the 1946 Franco–Italian postal agreement

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Drawing on the holdings of the National Archives in Paris and the archives of the European Union in Florence, this study seeks to answer the following question:

Was the European Postal Union a tool of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) aimed at integrating the six European countries, or simply an attempt at regionalization within the framework of the Universal Postal Union?

And did this mark a continuity or a break with the European Union of Posts and Telecommunications, which was founded in Vienna in 1942 and disappeared at the end of the war?

The first part of this study looks at the long gestation of the European Postal Union, from the failure of the Franco-Italian customs union, to the attempts of the Council of Europe, to the revival by Edouard Bonnefous (1955).

The second part analyzes the integration of European societies through the role of the Post in savings management.

Cooperation in the postal and telecommunications sectors fell within the framework of the Council of Europe and the ECSC.

The first impetus came from the Council of Europe, whose Assembly recommended the creation of a European Postal Union as early as 1949. But the first attempts failed.

So, in December 1951, the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe rejected a proposal to issue a European stamp. This project, an integral part of a set of concrete measures aimed at bringing the reality of European unification directly to the attention of public opinion (European flag, freedom of movement in Europe, cultural and scientific exchanges), ran into opposition from several countries. The main obstacle was the legislation of certain countries stipulating that the portrait of the sovereign or head of state must appear on every stamp.

In the same vein, in April–May 1953, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe rejected a proposal to create a postal union linking the member states of the Council of Europe. On that occasion, only seven countries voted in favour: Belgium, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Saarland, Türkiye and West Germany.

On 9 July 1955, Edouard Bonnefous, the French Minister of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones, presented a proposal to the Consultative Assembly for a European Conference of Ministers of Posts and Telecommunications. This memorandum was submitted to the Intergovernmental Committee for European Recovery, set up by the Messina Conference.

A sub-committee was formed to lay the foundations for a programme of European cooperation in the field of Posts and communications. At a meeting held in Paris on 20 January 1956, the sub-committee's report was presented to the ministers of the six ECSC countries responsible for Posts and telecommunications.

A representative of the United Kingdom participated in the meeting as an observer. Following their deliberations, the ministers decided to form three working groups: Posts; money orders; and telecommunications.



Subsequently, the representatives of the administrations of the six ECSC member countries, now joined by the United Kingdom and Switzerland as observers, met in:

- Paris (March 1956);
- Rome (October–November 1956);
- Frankfurt (February 1957); and
- Brussels (1958).