

# A View from London – Some concluding Remarks

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The Second World War was a territorial war and thus, it has always also been about infrastructure and resources. Hitler, the German government and High Command were looking to dominate Europe as a continent, to conquer formerly sovereign countries as German “Lebensraum”, to control, take over or dismiss national governments, to suppress resistance. The Wehrmacht quickly conquered and occupied territory. Confronted with the German Blitzkrieg, without any restraint in face of International Law or Humanitarian Principles, European governments and political elites from all European countries saw no other option than to flee and go into exile to Great Britain to safeguard their statehood and defend their interests from abroad.

While Nazi Germany occupied the continent, European political, legal and diplomatic elites, including the cabinets and heads of states, were gathered in an enclosed setting: wartime central London. This created a microcosm of transnational European cooperation, opening new possibilities and opportunities of cooperation caused by close vicinity and the joint experience of the war: a “London Moment”<sup>1</sup>.

The European exiles in London were in a curious position vis-à-vis their home countries, the nations they represented. The continent and their national territories were occupied by German soldiers, stripped of national sovereignty (in some cases, of statehood altogether). Claims to power and to representing the national will were equally difficult, as monarchs had left their home soil, politicians had gone into exile and been replaced with puppet regimes back home, or alternative collaborating governments had taken over. With regard to the theme of this volume, they were also in the difficult position of having given up all access to and control over national infrastructure, as well as most national resources.

The aim of this book, as stated by the editors, “write a history of Europe where technological cooperation and conflict are thought of, not in opposi-

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1 My remarks are based on findings within the research project “The London Moment”, funded by a Freigeist-Fellowship and research group (VolkswagenFoundation) at the Universities of Bayreuth (2021-) and Humboldt Berlin (2014-2020).

tion”, thus showing “how actors, institutions, practices and knowledge travelled from the interwar to the post-war through the wartime period”. Building on existing research by Patel/Kaiser or Schipper/Schot’s concept of “infrastructural Europeanism”<sup>2</sup>, this volume focuses on the governance and uses of networked technologies (railways, motorways, waterways, and how to build and maintain them) as well as on people responsible for the creation and maintenance, to follow the continuities and collaborations throughout wartime.

The following conclusion aims to discuss the gap and yet interconnection between what was happening on the occupied continent, where conflict and cooperation went hand in hand, and London as the seat of European’s exiled governments on the other hand, where an allied post-war order was planned from afar. Debates in London correspond to the broader topics discussed in this volume (communication, transportation, advertising cooperation, and the personal dimension) and the respective contributed chapters. Since exiles in London had almost no control over infrastructure, the relevant term of reference were national resources. In both cases, whether on the continent or in wartime London, debates about resources, infrastructure and cooperation should be read, as this volume has pointed out, as debates about power, control, and statehood as well as about the intertwined spheres of the national and the transnational.

The European exiles in London were in a delicate position and in dire need of legitimation – by their host country, by other Allies, by international law, but also by their people back home. The agency of these exiled representatives was thus restricted by their own precarious legal situation as well as by the lack of control over what is usually understood as the pillars of statehood: they neither had control over state territory, people, and state power, nor held a monopoly over the employ of physical force. Lacking these pillars of statehood endangered their legitimacy and threatened a lower status within the Allied hierarchy.

The European political exiles in London were a relatively small circle (very small if only counting the governments, counting up to a couple of hundreds when including the ministries, then surrounded by a larger circle of advisers, secretaries, translators etc), in which legal, political and diplo-

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2 Schipper, Frank / Schot, Johan: “Infrastructural Europeanism, or the project of building Europe on infrastructures: an introduction”, in: *History and Technology* 27 (3), 2011, pp. 245 – 264.

matic functions often overlapped. The state in exile was constructed by legal discourse and representation as well as by the exiles' practices of governance and performance of power. The London microcosm also featured various platforms of intense transnational exchange, providing the European exiles in London with a much needed sounding board for concepts to stabilize Europe. The interaction of exiles in London is not so much a story of the European integration of nations than rather a *histoire croisée* of European post-war plans. The London microcosm represents a transnational political space of governments, meaning it looks at transnational interaction without neglecting or denying the impact of the national or of the state.<sup>3</sup>

Legal recognition laid the foundation for legislation in exile, and was achieved and maintained by continuous lobbying of legal experts and advisors in and around the governments in exile.<sup>4</sup> In a second step, access to resources was essential to the agency of the exiled governments and to their capability to govern, not only in terms of diplomatic representation on an international level (even though this was essential), but also with regard to their own citizens – in so far contact was possible under the limiting circumstances.

Resources were important in a very broad understanding – extending to monetary and non-monetary resources of different kinds. Monetary resources are understood as resources which have a direct monetary value and/or can be directly exchanged against money. This includes raw material, gold, loans, credits, and commodities. Non-monetary resources on the other hand included aspects as access to infrastructure such as telecommunication, radio and cypher, the very obvious military support in terms of arms and munition as well as ships and aircraft, but also something more mundane like buildings to host governments. Besides military and welfare expenses, which had to be paid for, the daily logistics of government in exile also demanded these non-monetary resources. This problem was solved mostly outside of the discussion of war credits and re-payments, but in a more straightforward way: The British government provided the allied exiled European governments with (or helped them find) much needed

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3 Budde, Gunilla / Conrad, Sebastian / Janz, Oliver (eds.): *Transnationale Geschichte. Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, Göttingen 2006; Patricia Clavin, "Introduction: Conceptualising Transnational Thought and Action between the Wars" in: Laqua, Daniel (ed.): *Internationalism Reconfigured. Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars*, New York 2011, pp. 1 – 14.

4 Madsen, Mikael R.: "Unpacking Legal Network Power: The Structural Construction of Transnational Legal Expert Networks", in: Fenwick, Mark / Van Uytsel, Steven / Wrbska, Stefan (eds.): *Networked Governance, Transnational Business and the Law*, Berlin 2014, pp. 39 – 56.

commodities: real estate and significant parts of the running costs. Interallied collaboration was closely linked to space and locations in the city of London. In many cases, the provision of said places (in terms of offices and meeting space) were supported by the British host, who continued to do so during the war even through rough patches in political collaboration.

In wartime London, the British parliament passed legislation enabling the British state to requisition buildings and real estate for war purposes.<sup>5</sup> On the countryside, this usually meant commandeering land formerly used for agricultural purposes and repurpose it for military practice or airfields. In town, and particularly in London, this enabled the British government to house ministries and B.B.C. offices in formerly private buildings.

At the same time, war endangered European infrastructure on the occupied continent. This volume had set out to discuss the role of political, social, infrastructural, societal and similar reasons and their impact in cooperation, non-cooperation and integration on the continent. Its choice of examples engages with the important question of axis rule and infrastructure – did political rule entail technological domination? Or did technological knowledge and expertise from the interwar period (in particular with regard to France and French experts) persist? The larger themes of the volume are communication, transportation, advertising cooperation, and biographies or biographical continuities – and, of course, as a red thread throughout the book, transnational cooperation and its rupture or continuance during the war and times of conflict.

The first part focusing on communication engages with postal service, telecommunication and broadcasting. In the chapter on the European Postal and Telecommunications Union (EPTU), Proschmann engages with an institution founded during wartime, in October 1942 in Vienna. The founding date seems to indicate that EPTU was under German control and was initiated to “to dictate the continent’s postal rules”. However, the chapter makes a strong point for the equally important influence “of path dependency and technocratic traditions [which might have led] to an organisation without (geo)political influence?” All administrations involved had an interest in this cooperation, war or not. At the same time, war was the focal point for the diplomatic and foreign policy agents of this interaction, who were mostly interested in building up a functioning post-war postal organisation. Continuities from interwar cooperation were strong, while at the same time,

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5 Emergency (Defence) Act 1939, strengthened by the Landlord and Tenant (Requisitioned Land) Acts 1942 and 1944.

language, currency and location were adapted to the new German (and, with regard to language, Italian) power, to a loss of formerly dominating France, laying the foundation for its use in propaganda to promote a 'New Europe'. Displaying the interconnections between different long-term framework and new, realpolitical power changes, the case study underlines nonetheless the often underestimated agency of occupied countries' administrations and evaluates the EPTU eventually as "big achievements in the standardisation of European postal infrastructure". These are further explored with the example of stamps, which were discussed under the German *Reichspostministerium* for all of Europe but eventually only nationally implemented due to financial and technical difficulties.

Moving from communication to broadcasting, the International Broadcasting Union (IBU) is described as having chosen a "'third way' of dealing with the wartime tensions": neither discontinuing their activities nor transforming into a new institution, the IBU is described in terms of continuity. This was enabled by two important protecting factors: firstly the protection of Swiss law and neutrality, and secondly, the impact of secretary general at the time, Arthur Burrows, who supported remaining on Swiss soil in April 1940. Despite Swiss neutrality, Germans tried to gain influence within the IBU and instrumentalised it for political purposes, in particular when dealing with broadcasting stations in occupied countries like Belgium, Denmark, France, Norway and the Netherlands, where broadcasting was soon under Nazi control.

Its role changed significantly in 1941, when members from ten European countries, including the BBC, left the IBU because of its collaboration with the Nazi authorities. The attempt to remain neutral had been unsuccessful – or too difficult. Its post-war reconstruction as two separate organisations was due to the effects of the Cold War. The IBU's interwar structure, vision and even the individual representatives survived the rupture during the war and continued their work within these new organisations.

In London, for the allied exiled governments, access to diplomatic bags was as important as to radio and telecommunication, aspects also intensely discussed on the continent. In many cases, radio was the only way to communicate directly (with news programmes and speeches, but also cultural broadcasts) or covertly (with hidden messages) between the exiled government and the population left behind on the continent. The fact that back home, communication was under German control was a constant topic in London, and trying to counter this monopoly on information was a reason for close cooperation between the exiled governments and the B.B.C., which turned out to be a foundation for in-depth wartime broadcasts in all

kinds of languages. Eventually, this turned into the initiation of Radio Free Europe, which should become essential during the later Cold War period.

The second part of this volume concentrates on transportation, infrastructure in a very classic understanding: waterways, railways, motorways. With regard to waterways, administration and cooperation was, of course, more tied to the actual physical conditions (in contrast to the more “virtual” broadcasting and telecommunication). Accordingly, transnational administration of the Rhine, which had been (re-)established in the interwar period, became quite a challenge during the Second World. Reorganisation of the waterways was considered a priority and quickly taken over by German occupiers. In the Netherlands, a special department for inland navigation headed by a commissioner („Kommissar für See- und Binnenschifffahrt”) was created for this purpose. In Belgium, the situation in inland navigation was similar, but slowed by a significant lack of ships. The occupiers Rhine policy was supported by the occupied administrations, but also by Switzerland. When the war ended, regulation mostly returned to a status more prior to the First World War, but close collaboration between national governments and lobby groups, a 20<sup>th</sup> Century phenomenon, continued. Most surprisingly, Thiemeyer stresses, “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”.

This kind of continuity was also seen in plans for the canalization of the Moselle. Again, the interests of the occupying power were essential and dominated the wartime plans, but were built upon and combined with pre-war plans. Martial Libera evaluates Nazi policy as one phase in a “*longue durée* of the Moselle improvement project”, but estimates that while it was “undeniably European by virtue of its route and implications, it was not at all in terms of its spirit”. A truly European approach should only be reached in the 1960s, within a joint venture to do so.

On the Eastern side, the German occupiers pushed to restrict international administration to purely technical issues (hydraulic structures, customs, navigation police, and social security of the personnel). Jiří Janáč argues that in contrast to usual cesuras applied to Eastern European history, the focus on infrastructural systems linked discontinuity less “to the wartime regimes and organisations, but rather with implementation of the liberal international system during the interwar period”. Following the careers of Czechoslovak experts underlined this approach.

Railways were maybe middle ground between the tech-heavy telecommunication sector and the very geopolitical immobile waterways. A framework of international agreements had been build up to ensure cross-border

railway traffic. Again, military domination on the continent meant Germany controlled European continental railways, with other national companies (including formerly mighty SNCF) having to accept this. Just as in the case study of waterways, the author points out that “all of this happened in accordance with international law as established before the war [...] at least in the French-German case”, which even encouraged further Franco-German technical cooperation, and joint operational standardization. Wartime cooperation in the railway sector can, the chapter argues, be characterised as continuity of the transnational circulation of rolling stock. Pre-war agreements remained valid, pre-war institutions stayed (at least nominally) in charge – very much unlike the postal and telecommunication sector. Post-war times saw continuation, but almost exclusively in Western Europe, with projects like a European wagon pool. With regard to motorways, the two decades between 1935 and 1955 were also first to introduce the import of foreign (then Italian and German) institutional approaches.

Exiled governments in London – as far as their notes go – were less concerned with these long-term trajectories, but more with three immediate problems of the occupation and control of infrastructure: Firstly, they worried in how far their own lack of control and the German gain of it would have impact on the war effort, indicated by discussions on the destruction or sabotage of this potential. Secondly, it posed one of many examples to ponder on collaboration in the negative sense: in how far could working with the enemy be excused as trying to save national infrastructure from destruction, and when did it turn into political betrayal of maintaining infrastructure for the enemy? Finally, infrastructure was a central topic when exiled allied governments discussed their plans for the economic and social reconstruction of their own countries and of Europe as a whole – as they did within so-called ‘technical commissions’ (meaning: experts working on specific topics such as war crimes trials or reconstruction) of the London International Assembly.

The third part of this volume points to the fact that infrastructure never purely consists of technology and material objects. It is intensely linked to its architects and caretakers (the people who invent, design and maintain it), but also to propaganda and communication surrounding it. The *Signal Magazine* was such an example, which served to introduce and lobby for the project of a “‘new community of nations’, one that reserved a special role for transportation, energy, and communication networks”, when talking about what was actually “maximal exploitation of the continent’s resources for the benefit of the German Reich”. The technological subject gave cover for more political aims: claiming that economic prosperity and interaction

were linked to a certain political future, while at the same time the past (older technology just as interwar politics) was discredited. Both were used “to legitimize the Third Reich taking over ‘leadership of Europe.’” Alleged technical superiority was used as an argument “to legitimize political and economic domination.” Enemies were discredited also with regard to their technology, and interchanged with Anti-Bolshevism, Anti-Americanism, both sometimes linked to a rising Antisemitism. As propaganda was an important factor during the war, this was of course met with allied counter-information. Unlike for the German side, journals and magazines were mostly off-limits for the Allies exiled in London, but shorter flyers and leaflets were dropped from airplanes or distributed by resistance members. All in all, radio remained the most important tool for national as well as for coordinated Allied propaganda, mostly in cooperation with the B.B.C. – providing the exiled governments with airtime and equipment to produce national broadcasts was thus an important provision of resources to the exiles,

The fourth topic of this book, the personal dimension, is a particularly interesting one, as it links all different kinds of infrastructure listed above (communication, transportation and advertising/propaganda) and reflects it under the light of a central question within entangled histories: the question of structure and agency, the impact of institutions vs. individuals. As is rightly pointed out, in the regarded examples “experts usually enjoyed long-lasting careers within the administrations, the organisations that they built turned out to be crisis-proof.”<sup>6</sup> These biographies, just as the infrastructure they are upkeeping, thus provide long-term trajectories throughout times of war and crisis.<sup>7</sup>

A closer look on French cooperation within the framework of the EPTU by Valentine Adelbert shows the continuous influence and agency of French experts during the war, also, but not only, as a symbolic gesture to integrate the occupied administrations. ‘Pre-war technocratic internationalism’, established in international conferences, was, however, undermined by the German rejection of telecommunications advisory committees – probably for exactly this very reason.

Karel Paul van der Mandele is introduced in a biographical piece as a central figure in discussions about river improvement, one of many Benelux agents (here as a Dutch lawyer) to do so. With a closer look at one of

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6 Laborie, Introduction.

7 Compare: See also: Patel, Kiran Klaus ; Kaiser, Wolfram, Continuity and Change in European Cooperation during the Twentieth Century. In: *Contemporary European History*. 2018; Vol. 27, No. 2. pp. 165 – 182.



the main protagonists, the Italian Giuseppe Gneme “The Dean of telecommunication”, Aldebert takes a closer look at continuity in biographies. Gneme had a strong background in telecommunication and was considered one of the leading interwar specialists. As such, he was consulted when founding the EPTU in 1942, but quickly lost his standing and was not reinvolved later in the war, proving the changing political frameworks.<sup>8</sup>

The balance between expertise and political connections is also discussed in the following chapter on two exemplary German protagonists: one with a long-time career in telecommunication, a key member of transnational expert community (Bornemann) vs. one with a wartime career in postal service based on political connections, who was very close to the German Foreign Ministry (Risch). Considering the steep political career ended quickly after the end of the war, while Bornemann’s expertise-based career was able to transfer into the post-war world, the authors conclude that “the more technical an infrastructure system is, the more indispensable the experts become, as a high degree of specialist expertise is required” (which was more important for telecommunication than for postal service).

The biography of another French protagonist exemplifies the ways senior civil servants adapted to changing circumstances under occupation. Pierre Marzin was a staunch believer in technology, which he also regarded as the crucial decisive factor in warfare. While he himself did not participate in the French resistance actively as many others did, Griset argues that Marzin nonetheless contributed significantly by covering for his colleagues involved instead of telling on them. In this chapter’s very generous estimation Marzin’s collaboration with the Germans was purely based on his eagerness to serve technology as a greater good, not on ideology, also enabling him to continue his career in the post-war period.

To contribute a concluding comment to this volume with a view from London seems fitting, as the volumes understand Europe as the European continent, and mostly the Nazi-occupied Western European one, although the occasional example for Eastern Europe is included. Linked to this definition of Europe is an understanding of infrastructure and technical collaboration referring to infrastructure physically linked to the European continent (or Western Europe): railways, rivers, motorways. During the war, all of these are under German political and military occupation, and presumably under German control. It is all the more interesting to see how the actual day-to-

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8 Although he retired only in the 1950s after having served again in international organisations.

day practice of maintaining cross-border infrastructure was seemingly less affected than one could have imagined, and the omnipresent dominance of the German Reich and its control over infrastructure was sometimes balanced out by long-term trajectories in form of biographies, institutions and practices of collaboration. As such, the contributions to this volume have pointed out change and continuity alike, ranging from German exploitation to continuation of interwar cooperation to the creation of new multilateral structure. Sometimes, ironically (and surely without intention) this should mean laying the foundation for later European rapprochement.

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