

“Cooperate!” – The Occupied French Administration, European Telecommunications and War: A Fragile Balance

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1. Introduction

“We know [...] that the PTT Administration dragged things out and raised objections, and that in the end, when the Germans left, the Convention had not yet been applied.”¹ This statement was made by the French historian André Paul while reviewing the wartime relations between the French PTT administration and German occupying forces. In the years following the war, France’s official position was to minimize its participation in the

1 „[...] Nous savons d’autre part, que l’Administration des PTT fit traîner les choses en longueur, suscita des objections, et que finalement, au départ des Allemands, la Convention n’avait pas encore été appliquée“, in: Paul, André (ed.): *Histoire des PTT pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale*, p. 264. Paul was a retired history professor charged with writing a history of the PTT by the War History Committee, returned to this idea after the war.

European Postal and Telecommunications Union (EPTU),² and to show a united front despite the multiple positions the French administration held with respect to this organisation. One may nevertheless ask whether the situation was so clear-cut.

France was first invited to participate in the founding congress of the EPTU³ in Vienna (12-24 October 1942), but was turned down by the *Reichspostministerium*⁴ a month before the event in September 1942 (due to France's continuous hesitation). In fact, during the EPTU's last days (1944-1945), France apparently had not applied its agreements—in spite of Germany's follow-ups⁵—as the available documentation mentions either refusals or delays. However, France was no longer marginalized in 1943 when, at Germany's insistence, it participated in two working groups on telecommunications, to the detriment of the Italian administration (which was nevertheless a founding member of EPTU). The interest of studying the EPTU through the prism of a non-signatory state is to understand the interrelationships between the organisation and third parties, namely the dynamics that bear witness to the organisation's constant transformation, which is the main topic of our chapter.

The EPTU was a postal and telecommunications organisation (originally German-Italian) ideologically defined by the *Reichspostministerium* — notably by the Ministerial Director Friedrich Risch (head of the Department of Foreign and Colonial Affairs at the *Reichspostministerium*) — as having a new and broad unifying role in Europe. During the EPTU's developmental phase (1942-1943), the postal dimension dominated the propaganda surrounding this Union (often referred to as the “European Postal Union”), and served as the framework for defining it. In fact, from 1942 onward the EPTU's telecommunications side was seemingly less marked ideologically, or at least symbolically (EPTU propaganda focused less on telecom than on the postal sector). Telecommunications experts sought to continue technical discussions at meetings by continuing the work of the

2 In German *Europäische Post- und Fernmeldeverein*.

3 See the contribution by Sabrina Proschmann in this volume.

4 The German Post Ministry.

5 “The German authorities returned to the charge [...] General Von Stulpnagel unofficially insisted to the French Government that France's accession to the European Postal Union be given as soon as possible [...]”, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8. Undated.

former pre-war advisory committees⁶, but also moving toward harmonizing telecommunications services (by making tariffs homogenous).

Most of the negotiations between France and Germany were conducted in the field of telecommunications, seemingly leading to “a broad German-French agreement on all technical issues.”⁷ In reality, the talks concerning France’s entry into the EPTU and the development of European telecommunications would always be tinged with ambiguity, a fact that can be explained by the pre-war relationship between the French and German PTT administrations.⁸ Following the First World War, the French administration chose to rely on American industry to develop its telecommunications service, giving birth in 1920 to a French-American industrial consortium (*Les Lignes télégraphiques et téléphoniques*). At the same time, a preliminary technical committee for international telephony in Europe was created in 1923, driven by the French Ministry of PTT. This committee refused the participation of German experts, and promoted the American Bell standards on the European scale. Although German experts were invited in 1924 to join the CCIF (*Comité Consultatif International des Communications Téléphoniques*, headed by the Frenchman Georges Valensi until 1956), it proved impossible to form a French-German technical alliance on the European continent. Despite these setbacks, Germany’s interest⁹ in involving French experts in this organisation did not wane with WWII. France’s entry in the EPTU would help legitimize this Union,

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- 6 *Comité Consultatif International Téléphonique (CCIF), Comité Consultatif International Télégraphique (CCIT), Comité Consultatif International de Radio (CCIR)*. See also note 40.
 - 7 Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/12286 Band 2, Letter (probably from Friedrich Risch) to the Federal Foreign Office, to the attention of (Georg) Martius (Chief of Transports Division, Department of Economic Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Berlin, 16.09.1943. The letter concerns the meeting of Committee 2 in Vienna during September 1943.
 - 8 Henrich-Franke, Christian / Laborie, Léonard: “Technology taking over diplomacy? The ‘Comité consultatif international (for) Fernschreiben’ (CCIF) and its relationship to the ITU in the early history of telephone standardization, 1923 – 1947” in: Balbi, Gabriele / Fickers, Andreas (ed.): *History of the International Telecommunication Union*, Berlin 2020, p. 215 – 242.
 - 9 In September 1942, Armeefeldpostmeister Müller considered “the presence of French delegates to be indispensable”, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Letter of the Services of the Armistice to the General Secretary of the Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones (Cabinet), 05.09.1942.

a symbolic aspect that worked in Germany's favour. One could also imagine that Germany wanted to ally itself with France in the technical field of telecommunications in order to counter Anglo-American domination.

To give an account of the dynamics surrounding the EPTU, I will first focus on EPTU activity in the field of telecommunications, and then analyse the interactions between French telecommunications experts and EPTU members. The central question will be the meaning of European cooperation during the war? I will discuss the EPTU's German-Italian origin in order to better understand its bias toward telecommunications. I will also analyse the position of telecommunications experts in relation to the EPTU, in an effort to identify the continuities and discontinuities with techno-diplomacy. I will then take a closer look at the French case, as well as the issue of European cooperation in the field of telecommunications. Finally, I will conclude with a study of the ultimate deadlock between the EPTU and the French PTT administration.

2. *The EPTU, a German-Italian Project?*

While the EPTU had a European focus¹⁰, its institutional origin was indeed German-Italian, as it emerged from German-Italian postal¹¹ and telegraphic arrangements¹² signed in Rome on 8 October 1941. The telegraphic arrangement was part of a special agreement¹³ between Germany (*Deutsche Reichspost*) and Italy (*Amministrazione delle Poste e dei Telegrafi*) that had been in force since 1 January 1939. These agreements concluded before October 1941 were the logical continuation of negotiations carried out earlier, for instance during meetings held in Bolzano on 30 November 1940 and in Munich on 16-18 January 1941 between Italian¹⁴ and German¹⁵ delegations. At the outset, each party seemingly gave

10 "The network of Universal Postal Union and International Telecommunication Union services is still far too large for a relatively small Europe", Risch, Friedrich: "Probleme und Ziele eines Europäischen Postvereins", in: *Postarchiv* 70 (1942), p. 81 – 103.

11 Entry into force on 1 January 1942.

12 Entry into force after activation of the international Brennero telegraph cable.

13 *Poste e Telecomunicazioni* 5 (1942), p. 137 – 138.

14 Dr. Bleiner, Dr. Capanna, Dr. Albanese, Dr. Ing. Baldini, Dr. Vasio, and Dr. Ing. Pepe.

importance to telecommunications in this new European project. A general meeting of the *Reichspostministerium* was held on 9 September 1940, with the presentation of a programme ascribing the *Reichspost* a central and pioneering role in the new construction of Europe. Emphasis was placed on creating a “European Information Association,”¹⁶ as well as the role of the *Reichspostforschungsanstalt* (Research Institute) and the *Reichspostzentramt* (Head office) as future “training and research centres for global information technology, and hence as the centre of the European telecommunications system.”¹⁷ On the Italian side, the decennia of Constanzo Ciano¹⁸ (Italian Admiral), which lasted from 1924-1934 under his Ministry, saw a profound reorganisation of telecommunications. Italy’s entry into the war in June 1940 reinforced its interest in developing telecommunications. The Italian perception of the EPTU after the congress is of interest: in December 1942, the Italian engineer Giuseppe Gnome indicated that the initial German project only mentioned a European Postal Union, but that in the Italian proposal, this concept was abandoned in favour of including telecommunications within this European project.¹⁹ Was the *Reichspostministerium* less involved in telecommunications during the development phase of the EPTU (1942-1943)? Was there a decline in interest resulting from too many constraints? In any event, the German-Italian axis clearly materialized in the EPTU as early as 1941.

At least half of the participants at the Munich meeting (January 1941) were experts who had participated in the pre-war meetings of the Consultative Committees for Telecommunications.²⁰ Most of them therefore had broad experience in the technical telecommunications problems of the

15 Dr. Jaeger, Gladenbeck, Ehlers, and Bornermann.

16 „Um alle diese Ziele zu erreichen, empfahl Flanze mit Billigung Ohnesorges die Bildung eines neuen europäischer Nachrichtenvereins, der auf dem Kontinent an die Stelle des Weltnachrichtenvereins treten solle [...]“ in: Ueberschär, Gerd: *Die Deutsche Reichspost 1933 – 1945. Eine politische Verwaltungsgeschichte, Band II: 1939-1945*, Berlin 1999, p. 161.

17 Ibid.

18 Also the father of Galeazzo Ciano, who became the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

19 Gnome, Giuseppe: “Il Congresso europeo postale e delle telecomunicazioni di Vienna (12 – 24 ottobre 1942)”, in: *Poste e Telecomunicazioni* 12 (1942), p. 317 – 328.

20 CCIF (*Comité consultatif international téléphonique*), CCIT (*Comité consultatif international télégraphique*), and CCIR (*Comité consultatif international des radiocommunications*).

time, and knew each other very well. This meeting of technicians reflected the field's importance for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of these two countries, as they approved the possible participation of other European countries in the future Vienna Congress.²¹ What's more, validation was required by the supreme command of the German armed forces, the OKW (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*): "The OKW is requested to agree to the foundation of the working group."²² The 1941 meetings were therefore already politicized, or were at least under the control of Foreign Affairs.

Resolving the technical problems inherent in telecommunications was discussed immediately. This decision was quickly followed by the adoption of German and Italian as the official languages for the 1942 Congress. The choice of these two languages would have a profound effect on the EPTU and its relationship with certain PTT administrations, such as the French administration, which clearly viewed this as a mark of Axis dominance. The following excerpt shows that this idea was also present with *Armeefeldpostmeister*²³ Müller in Paris, during his conversation with General Girodet, head of the French Delegation for Transmissions:

At the end of this meeting, Colonel Dr. Müller gave me the attached copy of the volume printed in Berlin, in German and Italian, to report on the progress of the Congress and the various provisions adopted by the participating States. I did not fail to point out to the *Armeefeldpostmeister* that this document, written in German and Italian only, did not include a French text, which is a most regrettable innovation. To a remark that it was an agreement between the Axis Powers, I replied that the organisers of the Congress had aimed to go further than an Italian-German agreement, since they were inviting all of the States of Europe to adhere to the provisions agreed in Vienna between the participating countries.²⁴

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- 21 "However, for the countries listed below b) [Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, Vatican City], the approval of the two ministries for foreign affairs remains to be obtained", Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/12284.
- 22 Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/12284, 12.09.1941.
- 23 The direct intermediary between the postal services of the occupied country and the German administration. He was a postal commissioner of the German Reichspost seconded to a German mission abroad and subrogated to the Foreign Affairs Department of the Reichspostministerium (headed by Risch). See also note 45.
- 24 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, L'Inspecteur Général Girodet, Chef de la Délégation française pour les transmissions auprès du *Militärbefehlshaber* en France à M. le Secrétaire Général des PTT, 16.06.1943.

This German-Italian dimension was also present at another preparatory meeting, namely a visit by the Italian delegation²⁵ to Berlin, Munich, and Vienna on from 8 – 14 January 1942, which included the Minister of Communications, Giovanni Host-Venturi. A number of visits to post offices and telegraph offices were organised. Of the fifteen members²⁶ of the Italian delegation from January 1942, made up of PTT experts and Foreign Affairs representatives, more than half²⁷ were present in Vienna in October 1942. This shows a real willingness on the part of the Italian delegation, as well as a permanence in its structure. The German-Italian foundations for the Congress of Vienna had thus been established.

However, there are elements that call this bilateral dynamic into question. Two months before the start of the Congress, there was apparent discordance on the Italian side:

As was also indicated to the Reich Foreign Minister, a discussion was to take place on 20 July in Cortina between Ministerial Director Risch and the Director General of the Italian Post Office Pession, on the further handling of the problem of the European Postal Union [...] However, on the evening of 14 July, the Reich Ministry of Posts was informed by Rome that the conference could not take place in Cortina because the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was causing difficulties.²⁸

The Italian Minister of Communications, Giovanni Host-Venturi, was hindered in his work by Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini’s son-in-law. Ciano seemed very reluctant to the idea of this “European” union led by Germany, and was undoubtedly influenced by his scepticism toward Germany. The German Post Office Minister Wilhelm Ohnesorge, who was a personal friend of the Führer, did not have similar problems. German preponderance was demonstrated in the preliminary phase by the fact that the majority of the arrangements prior to the Vienna agreements

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- 25 Half of the 1941 delegation took part in the January 1942 trip, including Dr. Bleiner, Dr. Capanna, and Dr. Vasio.
 - 26 The members were Giovanni Host-Venturi, Giuseppe Pession, Giuseppe Capanna, Pasquale Vasio, Benedetto Caldara, Vito Saracista, Tullio Gorio, Ferdinando Bagnoli, Alessandro Hiver, Michele Auteri, Giuseppe Bleiner, Leonardo Vannata, Arturo Ricci, Franco Salvi, and Mirko Antonelli.
 - 27 The members were Giovanni Host-Venturi, Giuseppe Pession, Giuseppe Capanna, Pasquale Vasio, Benedetto Caldara, Vito Saracista, Tullio Gorio, Ferdinando Bagnoli, Leonardo Vannata, and Arturo Ricci.
 - 28 Politisches Archiv, Berlin, R 160301, Postverein, 23.07.1942.

were bilateral arrangements between Germany and a neighbouring country.²⁹ Italian delays continued after the preliminary phase, because after the Vienna Congress in October 1942, Italy signed the Final Agreement of the Congress, but with the note “subject to subsequent validation.” This particularity, which was due to Italian domestic legislation, subjected the Agreement’s coming into force to conditions.³⁰ The Agreement was validated by a 18 March 1943 decree³¹ by the King of Italy, Victor-Emmanuel III. However, 1943 left its mark on Italy, which was now under Allied fire following the landing in Sicily 10 June 1943 and the start of the Italian Campaign. Thanks to a German intervention in September 1943, the north of the peninsula remained under fascist rule (actually under German domination), under the name of the Italian Social Republic. This troubled context obviously disrupted the organisation of EPTU-related events. The continuation of the war forced Minister Ohnesorge to cancel the Congress planned in Rome in 1943, and to replace it with a meeting planned in Vienna on 4 October 1944³², a development that of course weakened the Italian PTT administration.

The year 1943 was thus marked by progressive German pre-eminence over the EPTU. At the same time, the French PTT administration enjoyed renewed interest from the Reichspostministerium, which invited it to at-

29 Arrangements between Germany and the Netherlands signed on 4 December 1941 and 15 – 21 April 1942; arrangements between Germany and Finland signed on 12 December 1941, arrangements between Germany and Hungary signed on 2 June 1942, etc.

30 Europäischer Postkongress, p. 102.

31 Regio Decreto 18 marzo 1943 – XXI, n. 392. *Approvazione degli atti del Congresso europeo postale e delle telecomunicazioni, stipulati in Vienna, fra l'Italia ed altri Stati il 19-24 ottobre 1942.*

32 “At the invitation of the Italian Postal and Telegraph Administration, the next meeting of the Association was scheduled for October 1943 at the Postal and Telecommunications Congress 1942 in Rome. Unfortunately, both the warlike events and the progress of the Association’s work prevented the meeting from being held on time. The Italian Postal and Telegraph Administration therefore felt obliged to approach the German Reich Post Office with the request for the Association to hold the meeting on its own initiative. [...] Pending the agreement of all the administrations, the Deutsche Reichspost has the honour of inviting the European Post and Telecommunications Association to a meeting in Vienna, beginning on 4 October 1944.”, Riksarkivert, Oslo, A 22 Journalsaker, Der Reichspostminister Ohnesorge an die Generaldirektion der Norwegischen Posten, 12.09.1944.

tend a French-German working meeting in July 1943 (20-22 July 1943, in Berlin), as well as to participate in the meeting of the EPTU’s Second Standing Committee in September 1943 (1-7 September 1943, Vienna). In addition, Minister Ohnesorge addressed the French Minister of Production and Communications Jean Bichelonne directly, praising the “rich experience of the French administration.”³³ I will now examine this evolution, with a focus on the continuities and discontinuities of techno-diplomacy in the relations between the EPTU and European telecommunications experts. This analysis will provide a deeper understanding of the particular relations between the French PTT administration, its experts, and the Reichspostministerium.

3. *Telecommunication Experts and the EPTU: The Continuities and Discontinuities of Techno-diplomacy*

Prosopographical analysis of the EPTU highlights continuities with pre-war techno-diplomacy, which was intimately linked to the tradition of major international scientific congresses.³⁴ Since the end of the nineteenth century, PTT experts and their governments had been “putting the continent in order” through technology and the establishment of intergovernmental treaties. With regard to the EPTU, there were continuities with the pre-war period, as some experts such as Giuseppe Pession were already involved before 1939. Pession³⁵, who was the Vice President of the Vienna Congress and a member of Standing Committees 1 and 2 in 1942, was a leading expert³⁶ in the field of radiotelegraphy and electromagnetism.

33 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, 16.09.1943.

34 Schot, Johan / Lagendijk, Vincent: “Technocratic Internationalism in the Interwar Years: Building Europe on Motorways and Electricity Networks”, in: *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2008); Laborie, Léonard: “De quoi l’universel est-il fait? L’Europe, les empires et les premières organisations internationales”, in: *Les cahiers Irice*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2012), pp. 11 – 22.

35 In 1942, *Direttore Generale Poste e Telegrafi* (Director of PTT service).

36 He was the author of many books on the subject, such as *Lezioni sulle radio-comunicazioni. Vol I. Studio degli elementi dei circuiti*, Raffaele Pironti, Napoli 1930, p. 154.

Before the German Government rejected³⁷ the participation of the French delegation in the Congress of Vienna (September 1942), the *Reichspostministerium* drew up a list³⁸ of French experts³⁹ it would like to see participate in the Congress of October 1942. All these experts were recognized for their experience in the field of telecommunications, and the vast majority of them had already participated in International Telecommunication Congresses (ITU) and the meetings of Consultative Committees.⁴⁰ For example, Malézieux, the Chief Engineer in charge of long-distance underground lines, participated in CCIF meetings in Cairo and Oslo in 1938. Schneider, who was the head of the office in the telecommunications directorate, and who was sent in 1943 to the meeting of the second permanent commission of the EPTU, participated in the CCIT meeting in Warsaw in 1936. These examples show that the EPTU was not simply a political and ideological construction desired by the Axis, but also an opportunity to perpetuate a tradition of exchange between European PTT experts, which is clearly demonstrated by the study of individual paths. Techno-diplomacy seemed to be following its course, as in the fol-

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- 37 “On 22 September, during an interview, the Armeefeldpostmeister informed Mr Inspector General Girodet that he had received a telegram that morning from Berlin advising him that the higher authorities of the Reich saw no reason to invite the French PTT Administration to the Congress of Vienna.”, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Historique des pourparlers concernant la conférence de Vienne et l’application, par la France, des Accords issus de cette conférence, 17.06.1944.
- 38 This list, which was transmitted on 5 September 1942 by the Armistice services to the French General Secretary of the PTT, was both an innovation and a result of the war.
- 39 The Reichspostministerium would be pleased to appoint one or two of the following officials: Sirs. Aguillon, Malézieux, Bigorgne, Leroi, Schneider, and Dauphin.
- 40 CCIF, CCIT, CCIR (see notes 6 and 20). As a reminder, the Consultative Committees were independent of, but connected to, the ITU. This intermediate status avoided diplomatic pitfalls. Telecommunication Consultative Committees issued recommendations that were transmitted to the ITU and invited its members to comply with them as far as possible. See Henrich-Franke, Christian / Laborie, Léonard: “Technology taking over diplomacy? The ‘Comité consultatif international (for) Fernschreiben’ (CCIF) and its relationship to the ITU in the early history of telephone standardization, 1923 – 1947”, in: Balbi, Gabriele / Fickers, Andreas (ed.): *History of the International Telecommunication Union*, Berlin 2020, p. 215 – 242.

lowing episode from August 1943, when Colonel Müller, who was *Armee-feldpostmeister* in France, thanked the French PTT delegation⁴¹ for a stamp album offered during the French-German meeting of July 1943:

Finally, I would like to express my deepest thanks for the beautiful and precious stamp album I received during the Berlin session. This album will remain for me a lasting memory of the trip to Berlin made with the representatives of your Ministry in an atmosphere of camaraderie.⁴²

On the German side, there is no doubt there was political interference in EPTU affairs.⁴³ This was reflected in the decision, prior to the Vienna Congress, to have delegations from foreign postal administrations be accompanied by a German Postal Commissioner previously sent to the country in question.⁴⁴ Such “*Postbeauftragten im Auslande*”⁴⁵ were present in many European countries.⁴⁶ During the EPTU congress in Vienna in 1942, postal commissioners met to exchange experiences with the official representatives of the *Reichspost*. Their functions involved three central areas: deepening relations between the *Reichspost* and foreign postal and telegraphic administrations, providing intelligence advice to German Wehrmacht services abroad, and promoting the dissemination of German telecommunications technology abroad.⁴⁷ During 1943, this interference again manifested itself in the decision to involve the French delegation in discussions of the EPTU’s Second Standing Committee, which took place

41 The French delegation at the French-German meeting in July 1943 consisted of Moignet (Director of the Post Office at PTT headquarters, head of the French delegation), Bernard (Head of the Post Directorate), Schneider (Head of the Telecommunications Directorate), Malézieux (chief engineer at the Long-distance Underground Lines Directorate), Marzin (chief engineer at the Technical Research and Control Directorate), and Hilbert (chief engineer, technical adviser in the minister’s office).

42 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, *Armee-feldpostmeister* auprès du *Militärbefehlshaber* en France à M. le Ministre, Paris, 23.08.1943.

43 “Since last year, the *Reichspostminister* has personally signed all bilateral agreements on the approximation of tariffs in Europe.”, Berlin, Politisches Archiv, R 106301, Postverein, Note for the Reich Foreign Minister, 29.09.1942.

44 Berlin, Politisches Archiv, RAV Pressburg 233, Letter dated 08.10.1942 to the German Legation in Pressburg (Bratislava).

45 See note 23.

46 Croatia, France, Romania, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Sweden, Bulgaria, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Greece (and Serbia), Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Turkey.

47 Ueberschär: *Deutsche Reichspost*, p. 180

in Vienna in September 1943. Indeed, at the EPTU Plenary Assembly on 24 October 1942, it was decided that “Representatives of administrations which are not members of the European Postal and Telecommunications Union may also be admitted to the deliberations with the agreement of the members of the Committees.”⁴⁸ This was clearly the case for France, which was quite simply excluded from the Congress in 1942, and therefore could not sign the agreements. As a result, all member delegations would have to approve the participation of the French delegation in the September 1943 meeting. The *Reichspostministerium* ignored this:

I would therefore like to suggest, if you agree with my opinion, that Mr. Gnome, as chairman of Commission 2, invite the French PTTs to participate in the committee’s discussions. I think that, given the short time available, it may not be necessary to consult the members of the committee beforehand.⁴⁹

However, what actually constituted a real break with pre-war technocratic internationalism was the German administration’s internal denunciation of the role of telecommunications advisory committees, which it considered to be “under strong American and British influence.”⁵⁰ Moreover, this denunciation was marked by anti-Semitism (by some members of Foreign Affairs and Post Ministry), which was directed against the secretary general of the CCIF, the Frenchman Georges Valensi.⁵¹ Friedrich Gladenbeck (president of the *Reichspostforschungsanstalt*⁵²) continued in his 1941 letter addressed to the OKW (Supreme Command of the German armed forces):

In order to prevent the 3 CCIs from recapturing their former importance, I intend to found a working group of the European telecommunications administrations in the course of the European reorganisation. [...] I would also like to strengthen

48 Europäischer Postkongress, p. 294.

49 Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/12286 Band 2, Letter to the Italian General Directorate of Posts and Telegraphs, 30.07.1943.

50 “These committees, whose work is practically suspended for the time being, were under strong American and English influence.”, Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/12284, 20.10.1941.

51 “Also the Secretary General of the CCIF in Paris was Jewish.”, Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/12284, 20.10.1941.

52 Reichspost Research Institute. The letter is not signed, but several elements suggest that the author is Gladenbeck.

German influence over the technical development of civil communications in European countries, especially neutral ones, as much as possible.⁵³

This position was quite disturbing when compared with the opening speech by the President of the EPTU's Third Standing Committee, the German engineer Karl Herz, who in October 1942 explained that the Committee's purpose was to consider the technical arrangements to maintain alongside the recommendations of the International Advisory Committees.⁵⁴ One may legitimately wonder what the German administration's real motives were in setting up this European Post and Telecommunications Union.

Germany had an ambiguous position vis-à-vis other European delegates, or at the very least there was a difference between its administration (Post Office and Foreign Affairs) and its experts (from the PTT). This ambiguity was very well perceived by French experts and the French PTT administration, hence their mistrust and denunciation of “Germanic hegemony in Europe.”⁵⁵ France nevertheless participated in this ambiguity.

4. *France and European Cooperation in the Field of Telecommunications*

In 1942, the European particularity of the EPTU, and the fact that its postal branch operated independently⁵⁶ of the UPU (Universal Postal Union) office in Berne, blocked France: “The French Administration cannot lend its support to a European Postal Union that would operate outside the Universal Postal Union.”⁵⁷ European cooperation already existed in the

53 Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/12284, 20.10.1941.

54 Europäischer Postkongress, p. 220 – 224.

55 “Germany's attitude showed an intention to establish German hegemony over Europe rather than to conclude postal or economic arrangements in the interest of all European countries.”, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Note from the Directorate of Posts and Buildings for the State Secretary, 19.09.1942.

56 A “permanent body independent of the International Bureau operating in Berne”, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Organisation et fonctionnement d'une union postale européenne (1942?).

57 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Organisation et fonctionnement d'une union postale européenne (1942?).

field of telecommunications, but was developed in relation to the ITU office.⁵⁸ This secondment of the Reichspostministerium to the EPTU initially led to France's rejection, before its ultimate exclusion from the Congress by the German administration in September 1942. The French PTT administration used the term "dissidence"⁵⁹ vis-à-vis the UPU.

However, in September 1942 there was a change in the French administration, which indicated that it was ready to participate in negotiations "exclusively in the technical field,"⁶⁰ but not to the initial agreements, noting that the language used for the deliberations would not be French, and that the gold franc would be replaced by the *Reichsmark* as a standard. It is clear that this was a reversal of both the practices and symbols from pre-war congresses. French caution could also be explained as a reaction to the ambiguous attitude of the German administration, which had not provided a formal written invitation to France for the Congress in Vienna.⁶¹ Internal German documents from September 1941 show that France's invitation to the Congress was put on hold by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁶² One year later, on 22 September 1942, France was excluded from the Union by order of the *Reichspostministerium*. This decision was once again surprising, given that the *Reichspostministerium* had, through *Armeefeldpostmeister* Müller, considered "the presence of French delegates to be indispensable,"⁶³ and wished to designate French officials (on a list) as participants. Was this refusal a political choice on the part of the

58 See Henrich-Franke / Laborie: Technology taking over diplomacy?

59 "[...] it would be desirable for the French administration [...] to ensure that the creation of the new body does not appear to constitute an act of dissent or affect the prestige of the Universal Postal Union.", Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Note for the Secretary of State for Communications, 22.09.1942.

60 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Note from the Direction of Posts and Buildings to the Secretary of State, 19.09.1942.

61 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Note from the Direction of Posts and Buildings to the Secretary of State, 19.09.1942.

62 "When asked whether France, Belgium, Serbia and Greece should be invited to join the Association of European Telecommunications Administrations, Mr Martius replied that the question should remain unresolved.", Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/12284, 12.09.1941.

63 Letter from the Armistice Services to the Secretary General of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones (Cabinet), Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, 05.09.1942.

Reich? Was it symbolic punishment, a backlash against French demands (use of Golf franc and the French language) reminiscent of pre-war practices? Was the danger of protest by the French delegates during the debates too pronounced?

This fear on the part of the *Reichspostministerium* is understandable, as opposition from European experts also appeared with the Belgian administration in the weeks leading up to the Congress:

[...] The senior official of the Belgian postal administration had agreed to respond to the conference invitation, indicating that he would attend as an observer. However, the head of the telegraph administration apparently refused for political reasons. The head of the postal administration also later indicated that he would like to make as few external appearance as possible. Under these circumstances, the Minister of Post preferred not to involve the Belgian postal administration at all.⁶⁴

Despite the French “setback” of September 1942, the *Reichspostministerium* finally invited French experts to a French-German working meeting in Berlin from 20-22 July 1943, to reflect on “the conditions of France’s application of the Vienna provisions.”⁶⁵ At that meeting in July 1943 (preceding the meeting of the EPTU’s second Standing Committee in September 1943), French experts expressed doubts about the usefulness and effectiveness of the EPTU’s third Standing Committee (dedicated to telecommunications technology), whose meeting date had not yet been fixed⁶⁶:

Mr Moignet said that the existence of the 3rd Committee was undoubtedly useful for the present. However, he questioned whether the existence of the 3rd Committee was appropriate in the long term. [...] The French delegation asked whether, by setting up the Third Committee, the Congress of Vienna had not prepared to some extent the unification of European technology, which would give European industry protection against foreign industry. The German side replied that the establishment of the Third Committee was not a fight in any direction [...].⁶⁷

64 Berlin, Politisches Archiv, R 106301, Postverein, Ministerial Director Wiehl to the Reich Foreign Minister, 08.10.1942.

65 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Letter from Inspector General Girodet, Head of the French Delegation for Transmissions to the Militärbefehlshaber in France, addressed to Mr Secretary General of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones (Cabinet), 16.06.1943.

66 Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/11618, 21.07.1943.

67 Ibid.

Here French experts were potentially implying that the German administration was attempting to pull European telecommunications away from Anglo-American influence, and simultaneously subjecting them to the German technological model. The last quotation should be put into perspective with the *Reichspostministerium's* 1940 programmes, which outlined the goal of “creating a European telecommunications system” in which “the German cable network is at the heart of Europe’s telecommunications development.”⁶⁸ Internal documents from the *Reichspostministerium* seem to confirm that during the preliminary phase of the Congress, interest in technical telecommunications issues was strategic (economic and political), and even ideological. This motivation was of course hidden from the other EPTU partners at the Congress. A relevant question is whether the German administration gave the same importance to technical telecommunications issues during the EPTU’s developmental phase (after the 1942 Congress). The ambiguity was actually maintained, as telecommunications seemingly took a back seat. It is safe to assume that until the French administration formally joined the EPTU, the *Reichspostministerium* and the German Foreign Ministry would relegate telecommunications and its technical aspect to the background. This relegation was present at the 1942 Congress, namely in how the EPTU’s Committee 3 was managed. The treatment of the issues of Commission 3 (telecommunications technology) were postponed following the Congress:

The 3rd Commission, due to time constraints, was not able to deal with any of the issues in Vienna, but was only concerned with the precise and complete formulation of these issues and the practical system for their study. [...] The above organisation seems very complicated, and perhaps it would have been more appropriate to adopt the existing rules for the International Telecommunications Consultative Committee, according to which committees of rapporteurs are appointed and grouped as and when the need arises. In any case, the above distribution must be considered as provisional, and the 1943 Rome Conference could amend and renew it according to what the first experiences will suggest.⁶⁹

Once again, this particular situation surrounding telecommunications was accentuated by the scepticism of French experts, who were key players in European telecommunications at the time. While they were of course not the only important players, since the Germans and Italians had a high level

68 Ueberschär: Deutsche Reichspost, p. 161.

69 Gnome: Il congresso, p. 317 – 328.

of expertise, it was difficult to conceive of genuine European synergy without the help of French experts and industry. This has been confirmed by the historian Gerd Ueberschär, who has commented on what *Armee-feldpostmeister* Müller said at the meeting of postal commissioners in March 1943:

The French production potential for the needs of the German post office was permanently exploited by means of transfer orders [...] the construction of telephones parts and alternating current devices was ordered by German industry in France, and used in Germany to set up telecommunications installations. Likewise, the Research Institute and the *Reichspost* Central Office [...] ordered shortwave transmitters and receivers [...] from French industry [...]. The French postal administration had been influenced to adapt to German standards as much as possible, and to build the equipment in such a way that it required as little raw material as possible. [...] The former French telecommunications companies were working on a large scale for Germany, whereas German companies had only taken orders for military installations in France.⁷⁰

Scepticism among French experts was probably heightened after Germany insisted on continuing negotiations for the European telecommunications network, which had been practically inoperative during the war. This was expressed by the head of the French delegation Moignet in July 1943 (French-German meeting):

France’s application of the Vienna Convention is of little practical significance at present, as almost all telegraphic connections between France and other countries are cut off. It would therefore be necessary to improve this situation noticeably beforehand.⁷¹

Dr. Risch (German delegation) then defended the German position, which was laying the groundwork for the development of European telecommunications in times of peace.⁷² The peace argument is disturbing, because as early as 1940 the president of the central post office, Günter Flanze, internally defended the exploitation of occupied territories to establish telecommunications domination in Europe, supported by the unlimited power

70 Ueberschär: *Deutsche Reichspost*, p. 182 – 183.

71 Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/11618, 21.07.1943.

72 “With regard to this, Ministerial Director Dr. Risch remarked that the communication of almost all countries was subject to great restrictions during the war, but that in preparation for the peace work, the regulations should already be made now.”, *ibid.*

of the Wehrmacht, “which would not continue after the peace negotiations.”⁷³

Dr. Risch’s preponderance in the discussions (between French and German experts in July 1943 in Berlin, and in the meeting of Commission 2 in September 1943 in Vienna) proved to be a hindrance, as he was the ideologist of this new European organisation of the Post and Telecommunications.⁷⁴ He was a lawyer and a member of the NSDAP, but most importantly the ministerial director responsible for foreign affairs at the *Reichpostministerium*. Points of view were therefore exchanged within a politicized context. This great mistrust of French experts is a key to understanding the minimal propaganda surrounding this meeting. The specialized journals of the time, such as *Die Deutsche Post*, provide evidence of real propaganda regarding the *Europäische Post und Fernmeldeverein* in 1941-1942, mostly on the front page of newspapers. However, in 1943 the announcement of the French-German working meeting of July 1943 was the subject of six lines in the “*Petits messages*” section of the magazine.⁷⁵ This French mistrust was a thorn in the Reich’s side, and illustrated the difficulty it had in subjugating the French PTT administration.

The discrepancies between the French and German delegations of course continued at the meeting of the EPTU’s Second Standing Committee (on telecommunications service and tariffs), which brought together member delegations and the French delegation in September 1943. Three points of tension emerged very clearly, and would persist until 1945: the question of the French language at the EPTU (entailing the French delegation’s influence in decision-making), the use of the *Reichsmark* as a standard currency, and postal and telegraphic restrictions (and their impact on the entry into force and implementation of EPTU agreements by France).

73 Ueberschär: *Deutsche Reichspost*, p. 160 – 161.

74 Risch: *Probleme und Ziele eines Europäischen Postvereins*, p. 81 – 103.

75 *Die Deutsche Post, Zeitschrift für das Post- und Fernmeldewesen*, no. 21 (07.08.1943), p. 209.

5. *The EPTU and the French PTT Administration: The Deadlocks*

Shortly before the Vienna Congress, the French PTT administration, which was in the midst of negotiations⁷⁶ with the *Reichspostministerium*, internally raised the problem of the language to be used during the deliberations:

Drawing a link between the old and the new continent, Mr Arnal⁷⁷ has every reason to suppose that, like the United States of America, Germany wishes to play the role of arbiter between States in the new Europe, both politically and economically, and it is for this reason that it is seeking the preponderance of its currency by designating it as the standard. The adoption of a draft European Postal Convention, which would include the use of the German language for deliberations, and the *Reichsmark* in place of the gold franc for the fixing of postal rates, would be a first success of the Reich towards its goal.⁷⁸

This “regrettable innovation” discouraged the French administration from initiating potential agreements.⁷⁹ The French position did not prevent the simultaneous constitution of a delegation of French experts. French hesitations abruptly ended with the exclusion of 22 September 1942. Following its exclusion from the Congress, the French administration renewed its questions about the EPTU’s working language during the French-German meeting of July 1943.⁸⁰ The French experts present at the meeting clearly stressed that the use of French was a *sine qua non* condition for France’s entry into the EPTU:

The Head of the French delegation also stressed the interest that the European Union itself would find in this, since France’s decisions with regard to the European

76 “Finally, he (Dr. Müller) added that in order to easily follow the discussions, which had to be held mostly in German, it was desirable for him (a French expert) to speak German, without this condition being obligatory,” (21.08.1942), Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, Historique des pourparlers concernant la conférence de Vienne et l’application, par la France, des Accords issus de cette conférence, 17.06.1944.

77 Pierre Arnal, Deputy Director of Economic and Political Affairs, Ministry of the Economy

78 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, 19.09.1942

79 Ibid.

80 “It was on this occasion that Mr Moignet, Head of the French Delegation, raised the question of the use of French as an official language, in the same manner as the two other languages already admitted by the Vienna Agreements.”, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, 24.09.1943.

Union were likely to influence those of other countries. Finally, he stated that the French Administration attached the greatest importance to this question, and he had doubts about the French Administration's attitude in the future if satisfaction was not given.⁸¹

To justify its request, the French delegation praised the precision of its language, and offered reminders of pre-war international scientific congresses (where French was predominant).⁸² The German delegation, through Dr. Risch, reassured the French experts, although there was already a divergence of German and French sentiment regarding the admission of French at the EPTU. In internal German documentation, the principle remained uncertain⁸³, while on the French side the hope of the French language being accepted justified French participation at the meeting of the Second Permanent Committee in September 1943.⁸⁴ The political dimension of this choice was clearly expressed.

The recognition of French as an official language also raised another question, namely the role of French representation in the deliberations. In July 1943, Dr. Risch promised "that he would propose that the French Administration take part in the work of the Union's commissions 'as an active member with full rights,' which is to say with the right to vote in particular."⁸⁵ However, the French delegates Schneider and Marzin noted that their voice was in reality only advisory.⁸⁶ This statement is also ex-

81 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, Historique des pourparlers concernant la conférence de Vienne et l'application, par la France, des Accords issus de cette conférence, 17.06.1944.

82 Ibid.

83 "Dr. Risch explains that the language issue is a political issue, and that the German position is therefore determined by the Federal Foreign Office. He wanted to start the negotiations concerned, but could not make any promises about the outcome.", Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/11618, 21.07.1943.

84 "During the month of August, the Administration was assured that, according to senior German officials, the principle of the use of French as an official language was accepted and, on the basis of these indications, the French delegation went to Vienna to attend the meeting of the Second Committee scheduled for 1 September," Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, 24.09.1943.

85 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 19960439/8, Rapport sur la mission de M.M. Scheider, Chef du Bureau et Marzin, Ingénieur en Chef, Désignés pour représenter l'Administration française à la première réunion à Wien, de la deuxième commission de l'Union européenne des postes et des télécommunications.

86 Ibid.

plained by the fact that French was not accepted as the language of the deliberations:

As the interventions of German- and Italian-speaking delegates did not need to be translated into French, the head of the French delegation declared and confirmed in the minutes of the 3rd meeting that he could, under these conditions, only play the role of observer.⁸⁷

The refusal to use French isolated French experts from the deliberations: “The French delegation was unable to follow the committee’s work in detail, as the interpreter could only provide very partial translations of foreign delegates’ speeches.”⁸⁸ Once again the German view of the situation was different:

The meetings were informally distributed to them in French translation. In addition, the two French representatives had a personal meeting with the unprecedented opportunity to express their views [...] with broad French-German agreement on all technical matters, so that the subsequent entry of the French administration into the European Union of Posts and Telecommunications would not give rise to many differences of opinion or difficulties in a specialized field.⁸⁹

Another point of tension between the French and German administrations in the context of the EPTU was the issue of the benchmark currency. The German choice of using the *Reichsmark* as the standard currency was justified by Dr. Risch: “[...] in the jurisdiction of the European Postal Union, a living currency, the mark, had been chosen instead of a fictitious currency, the franc-or.”⁹⁰ This justification did not carry much weight; while the issue could be seen as being exclusively ideological, it posed real economic problems for the French administration (and also raised political issues), as did the decision to bring postal (and telegraph) rates in line with German rates.⁹¹ The French administration was not the only one reluctant to

87 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, 24.09.1943.

88 Ibid, Rapport sur la mission de M.M. Scheider et Marzin.

89 Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, R4701/12286 Band 2, 16.09.1943.

90 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, Historique des pourparlers concernant la conférence de Vienne et l’application, par la France, des Accords issus de cette conférence, 17.06.1944.

91 “[...] the substitution of the Reichsmark for the international franc-or for the fixing of basic charges raised objections, [with] the gold franc as determined at the Madrid Congress being the monetary standard adopted by the Universal Postal Union on which the international tariffs of all the countries of the Union are based. The coexistence of two monetary standards could therefore only be a source of difficulty. On the other hand, the French rates, if they were aligned with

replace the gold franc by the Reichsmark, as this was also the case with the Romanian delegation at the Congress of Vienna in October 1942.⁹²

The final condition (and impasse) in France's acceptance of the EPTU agreements were the restrictions affecting French posts and telecommunications within the national territory, especially the removal⁹³ of the demarcation line in France:

As far as the telegraph is concerned, only official and commercial telegrams between authorized correspondents and family telegrams reporting the death or serious illness of a close relative shall be admitted. With regard to the telephone, posts capable of exchanging interzone communications must be authorized in advance, and the number of circuits available to the French services is so small that it imposes waiting times of several hours, and even prevents a large part of the communications requested from being carried out.⁹⁴

This French particularity prevented it from having a "normal regime" for PTTs, and was even the cause of discrimination.⁹⁵ Improvements were certainly made between the zones and the outside world: in late 1942, telegraph communications were re-established between Northern France and various European countries that were members of the EPTU (Bulgaria,

German rates, would become dependent on variations in the value of the Reich currency or the value of German internal prices. It is therefore to be feared that our country would have to undergo tariff changes unrelated to its monetary situation or the level of its own prices, or would not be able to raise its rates in line with the evolution of its own situation.", *ibid.*

92 "The Romanian PTT administration declares itself in agreement with the German proposals for the unified fees and the other fees provided for in these Regulations, but on the condition that the unified fees and fee rates, which are expressed in Reichsmark or Lire, are calculated and applied to Romania on the basis of the franc-or parity of the Romanian currency.", *Europäischer Postkongress*, p. 198.

93 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, The Minister State Secretary for Production and Communications, to Mr President Dr. Michel Head of the Economic Department of the German Military Administration in France, 09.06.1943.

94 *Ibid.*

95 "The Head of the French delegation gave details of the consequences of the current situation not only with regard to trade between the two zones, but also between each zone and foreign countries. He pointed out, in particular, that from a postal point of view, French workers in Germany are not treated in the same way depending on whether they come from Northern or Southern France.", *Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, Historique des pourparlers concernant la conférence de Vienne et l'application, par la France, des Accords issus de cette conférence, 17.06.1944.*

Finland, Italy, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary)⁹⁶; in May 1944 general postal traffic between Germany and Southern France was resumed.⁹⁷ However, there was no unification within the national territory, since the demarcation line was maintained until 1944.

The abolition of the demarcation line could actually be seen as an illustration of the genuine equality of treatment to which France aspired within the EPTU:

I have the honour of informing you that the Government of France authorizes the Secretariat General of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones to make the necessary arrangements with the countries concerned on the basis of full reciprocity. Without making it a precondition for the application of this decision, it urges that the considerable restrictions still affecting postal, telegraphic, and telephone services within French territory be terminated at the same time.⁹⁸

In fact, the removal of the demarcation line and the equal treatment of French PTTs vis-à-vis the *Reichspostministerium* were inseparable, and forcefully emphasized conditions for France's accession to the EPTU: considering that it might “make the necessary arrangements with the countries concerned on the basis of full reciprocity,” it was imitating the *Reichspostministerium*, which had signed bilateral agreements with future member countries. However, in a letter dated 21 April 1943, *Armee-feldpostmeister* Müller indicated that French accession could be done by a simple written note to the *Reichspostministerium*.⁹⁹ Still, the French administration decided to send letters to the various EPTU member administrations on 16 July 1943.

The German administration justified maintaining the demarcation line for military reasons, independent of questions of communications.¹⁰⁰ Noting that the German authorities brushed aside the French request to abolish

96 Archives diplomatiques, la Courneuve, Vichy Europe 245, 28.11.1942.

97 Ibid., 12.06.1944.

98 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, The Minister State Secretary for Production and Communications, to Mr President Dr. Michel Head of the Economic Department of the German Military Administration in France, 09.06.1943.

99 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, Inspector General Girodet Head of the French Delegation for Transmissions to the Militärbe-fehlshaber in France, to Mr Secretary General of Posts, Telegraphs and Tele-phones, 21.04.1943.

100 Ibid.

the demarcation line¹⁰¹, and that its mode of accession still posed difficulties and delays¹⁰² in early 1944, the French PTT administration postponed¹⁰³ the implementation of the Vienna agreements until 1 June 1944:

Finally, on 19 April, the Minister replied that instructions had been given for the necessary legal text to be submitted to the relevant ministerial departments, but that he was obliged to postpone until 1 June 1944, the date of France's application of the new regulations.¹⁰⁴

Five days after the expected date of implementation of the Vienna Agreements, the Normandy Landing took place. The Allied advance in June 1944 put an end to this "unifying" project for European PTTs, and instituted amnesia within the French PTT.

6. Conclusion

In this study, I highlighted the German-Italian origin of the EPTU, which had a Europe-wide mission. This origin was reflected in symbolic practices, such as the use of German and Italian as the official languages of the congress. In the EPTU's preparatory phase (1940-1941), both countries showed notable interest in telecommunications technology, although Germany gradually prioritized the postal component in the development of the EPTU project during 1942.

101 "However, a few days later Colonel Dr. Müller informed the Delegation for Transmissions that the Berlin authorities had refused their authorization in this regard.", Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, Inspector General Girodet Head of the French Delegation for Transmissions to the Head of Government Minister, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

102 "[...] the Minister did not make it known on February the 19th (1944) that, contrary to what Colonel Bienko (new *Armeefeldpostmeister*) thinks, the Romanian Postal Office has not yet responded to our proposal of 16 July 1943, nor has the Italian administration", Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, Historique des pourparlers concernant la conférence de Vienne et l'application, par la France, des Accords issus de cette conférence, 17.06.1944.

103 Ueberschär also refers to an agreement signed on 25 August 1944. See Ueberschär: *Die deutsche Reichspost*, p. 174. Given the context, it is safe to assume that an earlier implementation was highly uncertain.

104 Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur Seine, 19960439/8, Historique des pourparlers concernant la conférence de Vienne et l'application, par la France, des Accords issus de cette conférence, 17.06.1944.

The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two founding countries played an important role during the preparatory phase, although on the Italian side the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sometimes ironically proved a hindrance to developing the project. This was a first difference between the parties, which became more pronounced with the Italian defeat in 1943. This new situation, in which Italy had become a puppet state, legitimately raised questions about the country’s real role in the EPTU (the congress planned for 1943 in Rome was postponed). In 1943, Germany emerged as the EPTU’s sole leader. However, this new situation coincided with renewed interest in French participation, leading to questions about the union’s direction, specifically whether it was a political strategy, or whether it marked a desire to return to pre-war practices.

Focus on the continuities and discontinuities of techno-diplomacy within the EPTU revealed that the careers of telecommunications experts continued during the war, as did its network. The telecommunications experts who participated in various EPTU meetings had a long history of working together. What’s more, a scientific sociability seemed to persist despite the war, as demonstrated by the stamp album given as a gift.

The war disturbed this balance, and the occupation of territories was a form of pressure on European delegates. French delegates in 1943 were relegated to the role of observers, with no decision-making power.

The ambiguity of the German position prompted suspicion within the French PTT administration, thereby contributing to France’s ambivalence toward the EPTU. On-going talks between the French and German administrations demonstrate the mistrust of French experts, as well as the interest of the Reichspostministerium in the EPTU’s long-term development. Also, from a symbolic point of view, it was difficult to see the EPTU as a European achievement without France.

What should be remembered in this case study is that the sticking points between the German and French PTT administrations stemmed from the context of war, namely the debate surrounding the lifting of restrictions on telecommunications services within the national territory, and challenges to the gold standard and the use of French as an official language. However, these demands represented nothing less than a return to the ITU’s pre-war practices, and hence by definition were not compatible with the context of war and occupation in which France found itself. Efficient and “sincere” cooperation on the part of French experts was therefore unlikely. As a result, even though the EPTU was created and developed in a context of war, and discussions regarding telecommunications technology intensified, its long-term existence in times of conflict did not allow for real Eu-

ropean synergy, and had limited effectiveness. European telecommunications under German hegemony were a failure.

In 1945, acknowledging the collapse of the Third Reich, several EPTU member administrations decided to leave the organisation. Two examples symbolize the end of the “European Project”: a reply letter from the Italian PTT administration to the Postmaster General in Oslo (August 4, 1945, see citation below) and a letter from the Dutch Postmaster General to the Norwegian Postmaster General confirming the decision to exit the EPTU. In both examples, the letters were written in French.

Dear Postmaster General, I have the honour of informing you that I duly noted your letter no. 2454 from 5 June past, in which you informed me that your Administration considers the Convention concluded in Vienna on 19 October 1942 between countries belonging to the European Postal and Telecommunications Union cancelled [...].¹⁰⁵

This Italian response to the Norwegian request testifies to the willingness to end the agreement “officially and properly.” I would add that the Norwegian request was made to Italy, because Italy had reworked its Ministry of Communications on 12 December 1944. Germany, at the same time, was subject to the Allied Control Council (since 30 July 1945).

Members of European PTT administrations reconnected with the old tradition of international congresses from the interwar period, and preferred using French rather than German or Italian. This symbolic reversal went even further, as the Italian PTT Administration—an official founding member of the EPTU—preferred shifting back to French rather than using the Italian language in its correspondence. Six years of war and occupation, as well as the propaganda hammered home since 1941 during the implementation of the EPTU, had not defeated the old customs of postal and telecommunication experts.

After 1945, one could imagine the return of French influence in European telecommunications. However, the victory of Allied Forces disrupted the habits of European telecommunication experts (including their work-

105 “Monsieur le Directeur Général, J’ai l’honneur de vous communiquer d’avoir pris bonne note de votre lettre n°2454 du 5 juin écoulé par laquelle vous m’avez informé que votre Administration considère comme annulée la Convention conclue à Vienne le 19 octobre 1942 entre les pays faisant partie de l’Union européenne des postes et des télécommunications. [...]” Riksarkivert, Oslo, A 22 Journalsaker, Postmaster General in Rome to Postmaster General in Oslo, 04.08.1945.

ing language), confirming in fact the American influence that had been developing since the aftermath of the First World War. At the end of the Second World War, in spite of efforts to build a European Community, talks during ITU and standing committees proved this American hegemony in European telecommunications.¹⁰⁶

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106 See Aagaard Jensen, Sanne: *Nuclear-proof communications? The Cold War and the governance of telecommunications security in NATO and Denmark*, 2018.

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