



Doc. 424

15 October 1955

European cooperation in the field of posts and Telecommunications

Communication

Committee on Economic Affairs and Development
Lord L. John EDWARDS, United Kingdom, Socialist Group

1. Summary of the work of the Council of Europe in the field of posts and telecommunications

The Consultative Assembly has concerned itself with the problem of European cooperation in the field of posts and telecommunications ever since its first Session in September, 1949.

At that Session the Assembly examined a proposal([Doc. 10](#))to form the territories of Member States into a single postal territory and one for the issue of a European postage stamp.

The European Stamp

After devoting many meetings to an examination of the problems involved in the institution of a European stamp, the Committee on Economic Questions expressed the view, in a report submitted to the Consultative Assembly in May, 1951, that any attempt to give practical effect to this proposal might well evoke only tepid enthusiasm among the majority of Member States([Doc. 53](#)).

Having taken note of this opinion, the Consultative Assembly adopted a Resolution (No. 6) in which it expressed the hope that the competent authorities of Member States would have the matter studied by the appropriate Government departments, and invited the Secretariat-General to agree with the French Government on arrangements for issuing Council of Europe stamps. Although this object was not achieved, several Member Governments subsequently decided to issue series of stamps illustrating the European idea. The Secretariat-General has afforded its assistance in this connection.

Creation of a restricted Postal Union

In discussing the European stamp, the Committee on Economic Questions came to recognise the need for closer collaboration among Member States in the field of posts and telecommunications. At the invitation of the Committee, the Secretariat-General prepared a memorandum [SG/R (51) 16] in which the attempt was made to present the necessary measures in systematic form by defining the objects and aims of a " European Postal and Telecommunications Union ". During the second part of its Third Session, in November, 1951, the Consultative Assembly adopted a Recommendation (No. 9) in which it called for the establishment of such a Union among the Members of the Council of Europe. At its Tenth Session (March, 1952) the Committee of Ministers, after examining Recommendation 9, adopted a Resolution (No. 21) inviting Member Governments to make known their views on this Recommendation. Most of the replies being more or less negative, the Committee of Ministers expressed the view in its Fourth Report to the Consultative Assembly in May, 1953 [Doc. 122](#) , Chapter I (e)], that it was inopportune to carry out this proposal.

In its reply to this Report the Consultative Assembly reserved the right to re-open the question at a later stage.

New proposal by M. Bonnefous, French Minister of Posts and Telegraphs



There was no important development in this field until July, 1955, when M. Bonnefous, French Minister of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones, presented a Memorandum to the Consultative Assembly, during the first part of its Seventh Session, entitled " Proposals for developing European co-operation in Postal Services and Telecommunications " (cf. Orders of the Day-Minutes of Proceedings, page 45). On 22nd July 1955, the Bureau of the Assembly decided to refer M. Bonnefous' Memorandum to the Committee on Economic Questions (Reference No. 83).

The principal innovation to be found in the Bonnefous proposals, as compared with the detailed suggestions contained in the Memorandum by the Secretariat-General and in Recommendation 9 referred to above, is the idea of creating a European Conference of Ministers of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones, on the pattern of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport.

The proposal contemplates frequent contacts between the Conference of Ministers and the Consultative Assembly. It suggests, in particular, that the Conference of Ministers should present an annual report to the Consultative Assembly, which, in return, could place its wishes and recommendations before the Ministers.

The Memorandum presented by M. Bonnefous to the Consultative Assembly has been examined in detail by a special Sub-committee on Posts and Telecommunications set up by the Committee on Transport and Public Works of the Intergovernmental Committee created by the Messina Conference.

2. Summary of the work of the Sub-committee on Posts and Telecommunications of the Intergovernmental Committee set up by the Messins Conference

A brief summary is given below of the work done at Brussels by this Sub-committee in regard to the problems dealt with in the Bonnefous Memorandum, and of the earlier work of the Committee on Economic Questions of the Consultative Assembly.

The Brussels Sub-committee held its first meeting on 31st August, 1955, and presented its conclusions to the Transport Committee at the end of September. It had been instructed by the Steering Committee of the Brussels Conference to examine the proposals contained in the Bonnefous Memorandum for furthering European co-operation in postal and telecommunications services and to consider ways and means of implementing the recommendations made in this field, as between countries represented on the Committee and any other countries which might be invited to participate later.

It should be observed that the Subcommittee had to take account of the general directive of the Steering Committee of the Conference, to the effect that all committees and the subcommittees were to work on the assumption that a common market would be established.

In the report which it submitted to the Transport Committee, the Sub-committee suggested a certain number of measures for " creating an atmosphere favourable to the European idea and to the institution of a common market, by exercising a psychological influence on the populations of the various countries. "

These measures come into the postal and telecommunications field.

2.1. Posts

The Sub-committee made the following proposals :

- a. Simplification and improvement of postal exchange;
- b. Mechanisation, of postal services;
- c. Establishment of a body of rules intended, in the relations between the countries of Western Europe, to replace Article 48 of the Universal Postal Convention and Articles 127-141 of the Regulations for implementing the said Convention;
- d. Organisation of a European night air mail service;
- e. Issue of a postage stamp of a common European design;
- f. Establishment of rules for co-operation between customs and postal authorities.

2.2. Telecommunications

- (a) Development of European telephonic and telegraphic links—and in particular automatic and semi-automatic links;

(b) Extension of the network for transmission of television programmes;

(c) Issue of telegraphic and telephonic yearbooks;

The Sub-committee considered that " in order to achieve concrete results in respect of the various proposals made and of any other problems which might arise later, it is necessary to increase the number of regular contacts between national administrative authorities.

It therefore proposed the creation of a " permanent body for co-ordinating study and research ", a flexible formula which, although undoubtedly based on the more radical proposal in the Bonnefous Memorandum for the establishment of a Conference of Ministers of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones, makes allowance for possible susceptibilities while permitting the execution, in a transitional period, of the principal measures of co-operation proposed.

On the initiative of the Steering Committee of the Conference, the Sub-committee, after having submitted its draft Report, proceeded to study another proposal, the Belgian proposal for the creation of a restricted Postal Union.

Suggestions of the Sub-committee concerning the creation of a restricted- Postal Union

As stated in the first, part of this report, the Committee on Economic Questions, on the basis of the facts set out in the Memorandum of the Secretariat-General (SG/R (51) 16), had by the end of 1951 already accepted the idea of a restricted Postal Union among the Members of the Council of Europe (Recommendation 9).

The Sub-committee on Posts and Telecommunications of the Brussels Conference, in its supplementary Report, accepted most of the ideas contained in the Bonnefous Memorandum.

It unanimously recognised that the creation of a restricted postal union was possible and desirable. Possible, legally, and desirable " having regard to the need, if a common market is established, for giving concrete expression in the postal field to the fusion of the various national economies and the co-ordination of the general policy of the member countries in financial, economic and social matters. "

Moreover, adds the Report of the Subcommittee, the extent of the territories of the interested countries is sufficiently large to justify the establishment of such a Union, the more so since postal communication between these countries represents an important part of their communications in general.

In its Report the Sub-committee mentions the advantages resulting from the creation of a Union; advantages to the public and to the administrative authorities, and advantages in respect of international policy. Under the heading of " Disadvantages " it merely mentions the financial difficulties which might arise from the introduction of lower rates as between the member countries of the Union.

The Sub-committee agreed to accept the following points for inclusion in a draft Convention for the institution of the proposed restricted Postal Union :

the introduction of special rates for post between member countries of the Union;

the reduction or abolition of transit charges ;

the issue of a special reply coupon;

air transport facilities without extra charge,

The Committee on Economic Questions has not yet been able to devote a careful study to M. Bonnefous' Memorandum, nor to formulate its views on the results of the work carried out by the Sub-committee on Posts and Telecommunications set up by the Brussels Conference.

At the moment the Committee can only inform the Assembly of the present position in this field; it proposes to return to the subject later and give its opinion at the next Session of the Consultative Assembly.