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Postal Relations and Telecommunications

Report

Committee on Economic Affairs and Development

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A. Draft Recommendation

" The Assembly,

Noting that, in the course of its examination of the question of the European Postage Stamp, the Committee on Economic Questions emphasised the importance of considering a reduction in postal charges as between the Members of the Council of Europe,

Recognising that, apart from the considerable psychological effect which might be expected, the reduction of charges to the lowest possible figure, the speedy conveyance of mail by the widespread use of air transport free from surtax, the improvement of the postal and telecommunication services and the introduction of new facilities for users, would be measures of incalculable value to intra-European trade,

Having noted that a Postal Union with an internal scale of charges exists already between two Member States of the Council, namely, France and Italy,

Invites the Secretariat-General to pursue its examination of the problems as a whole, with the aim of assembling the fullest possible documentation on the subject and of combining the results in the form of a Memorandum,

And recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

1. should take all possible measures to bring about the prompt establishment of a Postal Union between all the Member States identical with that already in existence between France and Italy :
 2. Should extend to telephonic communications the facilities envisaged with regard to postal communications, account being taken only of distances and not of the frontiers separating the various countries :
 3. Should call for a Conference of European Postal and Telecommunication Services with instructions to achieve the aforesaid aims on the basis of the preparatory work set in hand by the Secretariat-General.
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B. Explanatory Memorandum

1.

The recent conclusion of a Convention between France and Italy providing for the adoption of an internal scale of rates for the exchange of correspondence between the two countries, has caused renewed interest in the question of the reduction, of postal rates between Members of the Council of Europe. The right of Member States to make arrangements of this nature is expressly guaranteed by Article 6. of the Universal Postal Union in the following terms :

" The countries of the Union and, insofar as their regulations permit, administrative departments, may set up limited Unions and make special arrangements among themselves with regard to the matters covered by the Convention as finally drafted and in its original form, on condition, however, that no clauses shall be included which favour the interests of the public to a lesser extent than the Acts of the Convention ".

The terms of this Article have already been given practical application in several cases of no little importance.

1. For example, there has been in existence since 1931 a " Postal Union of the Americas and Spain ". It is composed of Spain and all the countries of America and includes the Spanish colonies in Africa: twenty-three States in all. Exchange of correspondence between countries of the Union is, generally speaking, charged only at the internal rates of each country, and transit rates are not payable, whatever the destination.

2. But there are other arrangements than those providing for the adoption of the internal scale of rates. In certain cases States have concluded agreements (in accordance once again with the Article 6 mentioned above) under which rates for the exchange of correspondence between them are not brought down to the minimum level of the " internal scale of charges " but are simply " reduced ". This is so in the case of the Scandinavian Postal Union, comprising Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, which has been in operation since January, 1935. Finally there are also cases, within the framework of a Union with reduced rates, in which, by virtue of special additional arrangements, the exchange of correspondence between certain countries is carried on at the internal' rates. This last solution would appear to be of special interest. It clearly follows from what has been said that such action as the Council of Europe proposes would not be merely a matter of vague aspiration unlikely to have any concrete results but would be in accordance with international law and the practice of States. Questions connected with changes in postal rates, and with the improvement of the service in general, should be dealt with in all their technical aspects by a Conference of Experts. This Conference could also appropriately deal with the improvement of telecommunications in Europe, paying particular attention to measures that might as far as possible simplify telephonic communications between the Member Countries of the Council