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TITLE: Fragile Links, Frozen Identities. The Governance of the International Telecommunication Union during the Cold War and Europe (1947-1953)
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Abstract

While the Cold War is generally presented as an accelerative force regarding the European integration process during its early stage, this paper's aim is to show how the ideological divide between East and West prevented from any reinforced co-operation to take place within the Western bloc in some technical fields during the years 1947 to 1953. Our case study will be on telecommunications networks.

Despite its long apolitical tradition the International Telecommunication Union was immediately affected by the Cold War. At the same time it proved to be one of the very few technical organisations belonging to the United Nations system that the representatives of the Eastern bloc decided not to formally quit during the Cold War years (1947-1953). This mix was highly destabilising for those who had, at this very moment, to decide whether or not to create a new European forum for international telecommunications, deemed to accompany the European construction. Wouldn't this creation cut the last links between West and East and sign the death of the old universal ITU? On the other hand, wasn't the ITU's ability to survive to the Cold War a proof of its capacity to endure any initiative? The Eastern bloc versatile strategy (participation/obstruction) finally prevented Western European engineers to give support to political initiatives of the time aiming at deepening co-operation between national telecommunications operators.

Materials from the French, British and ITU's archives enable us to explore the impact of the Cold War on the day-to-day life of an international institution dealing with one of the hottest technology right after the Second World War. And from there on to shed a new light on the inability to build Europe on communications infrastructures.

1. Introduction

Since the middle of the 19th C., international telecommunications by land or undersea cables or radio links have allowed the transmission of information across borders. They have been used by governments, notably in the imperial context to tie together imperial states and their colonies, but also from the very beginning by the news industry, business actors and, marginally, common people to keep in touch with their relatives and friends while migrating abroad, mainly for labour or tourism¹. In order to organise and foster the deployment of these infrastructures a collective platform for the designing of technical and operational standards was set up early on the 1860s: the International Telegraph Union (1865) that became the International Telecommunication Union in 1932.

The ITU was an arena of cooperation with a universal scope, periodically gathering delegates from national public operators and, more and more, private telecommunication companies from all around the world. Its last conference before the war was held in Cairo in 1938. It survived the war and was reshaped between 1944 and 1947. How did this international organisation governing over the nervous system of the planet work during the Cold War? Did international cooperation get frozen or destroyed by the ideological divide and the rivalries between the Eastern and Western blocs? More precisely, what kind of impact the climate within the ITU had on contemporary projects dealing with the creation of new Western European

¹ Winseck D. R. and Pike R. M., *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930*. Duke UP, 2007.

arenas for a closer cooperation in the field of telecommunication, deemed to accompany the European construction: did it encourage or stifle them?

This paper explores the governance of the International Telecommunication Union during the “hot” Cold War years, between the Marshall Plan (1947) and Stalin’s death (1953) and its articulation with the European integration process. It both addresses the question of the early Cold War impact on technical international organisation and contributes to the writing of a history of the networking of Europe taking into account the global context². It shows that the destiny of some elements of the construction of Europe was played by a kind of actors and on scenes unfamiliar for their contemporaries and invisible within the historiography compared to the diplomats or the businessmen negotiating around foreign affairs ministries. As opposed to the general statement that the Cold War accelerated the European integration, this paper will paradoxically show that, precisely due to the political climate, no reinforced cooperation within the Western bloc nor any formal divide between the two sides of the Iron Curtain occurred during the years 1947 to 1953, in the case of the building and regulation of international telecommunication networks.

Materials from the French and British archives together with ITU’s printed sources enable us to trace back the impact of the Cold War on the day-to-day life of an international institution dealing with one of the hottest technology right after the Second World War. And from there on to shed a new light on the incapacity of building Western Europe’s identity on communications infrastructures till the second half of the 1950s.

2. The ITU within the United Nations system: a political shift

If one defines an international order or regime as a set of institutions, norms and values, then one can say that a new international order regarding the regulation of telecommunication was cast in the aftermath of the Second World War³. In the years 1944 to 1947, the USA and USSR acted hand in hand in reshaping the International Telecommunication Union. Even if it had never been the purely technical arena working for the intercommunication of the people across the world it pretended to be, the ITU was from there on more of a political nature. The international order in the subfield of telecommunication was aligning with the general world order.

The USA were not deeply implicated in the ITU work before the Second World War. Some feared that after the conflict they would marginalise or even suppress this organisation, historically controlled by the Europeans. But their new dominance on the telecommunication scene combined to the necessity of regulating the radio spectrum drove them to a more conciliating position. They decided to host a great conference in the US to rebuild the Union. In order to have the USSR with them, they

² Van der Vleuten Erik and Kaijser Arne, « Networking Europe » in *History and Technology*, vol. 21, n°1, March 2005, pp. 21-48. Alexander Badenoch and Andreas Fickers eds., *Europe materializing? Transnational infrastructures and the project of Europe*. Palgrave, 2010.

³ See COWHEY Peter, “The International Telecommunications Regime: the Political Roots of Regimes for High Technology”, in *International Organization*, vol. 44, Spring 1990, pp. 169-199 DRAKE William, “The Rise and Decline of International Telecommunications Regime” in MARSDEN Christopher T. (ed), *Regulating the Global Information Society*. London, Routledge, 2000, 364 p., pp. 124-177

proposed to organise a preliminary conference in Moscow (September 1946) and after that they *imposed* more than they proposed the meeting of a huge series of decisive conferences in Atlantic City (May to October 1947).



Hotel Ambassador in Atlantic City, New Jersey
1947 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference venue



Delegates at the 1947 Atlantic City Radio Conference

Source:

<http://www.itu.int/en/history/plenipotentiaryconferences/Pages/1947AtlanticCity.aspx>;
<http://www.itu.int/en/history/radioconferences/Pages/1947AtlanticCityradio.aspx>

The ITU stayed apart from the League of Nations scope during the 1920s and 1930s. This is why USSR, Germany and other countries that retrieved from the League of Nations during this period stayed on board the ITU. This is also why Spain invited USSR to participate to the conference in Madrid in 1932 despite the two countries did not have diplomatic relations. Some commentators thought the ITU would have acted in a better way if it had been controlled by this institution. At the conference they organised in Moscow, USSR delegates made clear their point: the ITU should lose its independence as a sanction for its collaboration or at least permissiveness with the Nazis before and during the war. For the Soviets, the Union should be as strongly tied to the UN as possible: only the official UN member countries should be part of the ITU and the ITU should follow UN's political decisions, being a technical "weapon in the hands of the security council".

The US Department of State agreed on many points. The general idea was that the United Nations should embrace all the sectors of international life. The USA wanted to transfer the siege of the organisation from Bern in Switzerland⁴ to the other side of the Atlantic, close to the UN headquarters, to internationalise the working force of the international bureau and to set up an Administrative Council: all of this to free the ITU from the Swiss government authority. The integration of the old institution –the oldest of all intergovernmental organisation- was seen as a signal to give, as the vivid proof of the force of the young UN.

These orientations were strongly contested by the Europeans. Strategically, the Swiss government offered the vice-presidency of the international bureau to an American citizen, Gerald Gross, hoping that the US would then moderate their reform

⁴ A country that « has not let good souvenirs to the USA » and has problematic relations too with the USSR. MAE, NUOI 375 : lieutenant-colonel de la Chevrelère, comité de coordination des télécommunications impériales, « Entretien du 11 mai 1946 avec Gerald Gross, vice-directeur du bureau de l'UIT. Mémoire », 4 p.

plans. French and British post and telecommunications offices wanted links with the UN to be as weak as possible. De la Chevrelière on the French part (*Comité de coordination des communications impériales*) and Sargent on the British part (General Post Office) had daily contacts to prepare a common position on that respect before the Atlantic City conferences. But they both had to struggle at home with their foreign office colleagues whom gave support to a closer connection between the ITU and the UN system⁵. For the French radio expert Pierre Lahaye, «the American plan is in fact a hoarding plan via the UN organisation »⁶.

The French delegation sent to Atlantic City in May was divided. Most of the delegates were “technicians” or experts of the radio and telephone fields. Within the delegation, Maurice Leproux, a civil servant from the French Foreign office, soon received from its ministry the order to silence them as they were outrageously campaigning against the ITU affiliation to the UN as a specialised institution. Leproux explained their view: with the affiliation, only full members of the UN would certainly be full members of the ITU, which meant that a large part of the territories of the French empire would no longer be admitted as full members, and that, as a consequence, a large number of voices would be lost by France at the moment of votes. This would be extremely harmful for French interests, notably in terms of radio frequencies attribution, for which “only the number (of voices) allows to win in this competition”⁷. It is not only a question of values or ethos that is motivating French or British experts in their campaign but also a question of interests, notably to keep their positions in the ether! According to Leproux many delegations, and probably above all European ones, are thus hesitating between their particular interest and general interest, following instructions that they have some difficulties to understand⁸.

At the end of painstaking negotiations in Atlantic City and Lake Success (with the ECOSOC representatives), a consensus was finally found: the ITU would be affiliated with the UN, but moderately. On the symbolical ground, the ITU headquarters would stay in Europe but should be transferred from Bern to Geneva. The budget of the organisation would stay autonomous. There would be no extra power for the General secretariat of the international bureau (some feared the USA imposed an American with reinforced competences), but an Administrative Council would meet once a year to better control the work done by the bureau in between the periodical conferences of delegates. Like in the Security Council of the United Nations, USA, USSR, China, Great Britain and France would have a specific

⁵ In March 1947, the declarations by the French Foreign ministry representative to the ECOSOC were strongly contested within the French administration by the « technicians community » as they opened up the way to « une ingérence très marquée de l'ONU dans l'Union au moins en ce qui concerne ses relations avec les organismes tels que ceux de l'Aviation ou des Transports maritimes. Il avait été au contraire reconnu désirable que ces liens fussent les plus lâches possible et que la politique fut écartée au maximum de l'Union ». Archives du ministère des Affaires étrangères (MAE), NUOI 376 : CCTI, commission 1 préparatoire à la conférence mondiale des télécommunications, procès-verbal de la huitième réunion (19/03/1947), 24/03/1947, 13 p., p. 5.

⁶ MAE, NUOI 376 : CCTI, commission 1 préparatoire à la conférence mondiale des télécommunications, procès-verbal de la dixième réunion (02/04/1947), 08/04/1947, 13 p., p. 8.

⁷ « les vieux routiers de la radio savent par expérience que seul le nombre permet de l'emporter dans cette concurrence. (...) c'est donc le souci principal de conserver le plus possible la situation acquise qui a inspiré la position de la délégation française à l'égard des Nations Unies ». MAE, NUOI 377 : « Rapport de M. Leproux. Rattachement de l'Union internationale des télécommunications aux Nations Unies », 07/08/1947, 4 p., p. 2.

⁸ MAE, NUOI 377 : « Rapport de M. Leproux. Rattachement de l'Union internationale des télécommunications aux Nations Unies », 07/08/1947, 4 p., p. 3

position, their representatives being vice-presidents of the Administrative Council. More important from the French or British experts perspective: the member countries could be different from the one participating to the United Nations –which could only be sovereign states. This was clearly a consensus found between proponents of the status quo and reformers. The latter obtained some key changes in exchange. It was acted that a member of the ITU that was also a member of the UN should follow the resolutions of the Security Council, notably in the case the Security Council intimates to interrupt the communication with a country.

At the end of the day, even if the ITU was far more autonomous than expected –like many other specialised agencies of the UN system⁹–, it was affiliated to the UN, so that it should participate to the construction of the new world order desired by the Superpowers and their allies. In a way the international telecommunication order and the world order were aligned. For instance, Spain was banned from the ITU conferences in 1947 following a UN General Assembly decision. In the words of a French diplomatic observer “a general ascertainment immediately appears: this is that the spirit old treaties of Union do no longer exist”¹⁰. The ITU was less impermeable to world politics. This was damaging a myth excessively important regarding the “technocratic internationalism” characterising many experts so far¹¹. On the eve of the Cold War, the ITU was then ready to align itself on world tensions and disorders.

3. From world order to world disorder: the governance of the ITU during the Cold War

From July 1947 to the middle of the 1950s, the “hot” Cold War opposed on every field of international life the Eastern and Western blocs. The International Telecommunication Union was immediately affected by the Cold War. But it also proved to be one of the very few organisations belonging to the United Nations system where the representatives of the Eastern bloc countries stayed on board.

We have already seen that the two Superpowers agreed on many points while refounding the ITU in the years 1946-1947. We have also pointed out that many of the political questions that poisoned the atmosphere in Atlantic City predated the East West divide –for instance, colonial voices. It would then be false to say that this organisation was stuck into politics due to the Cold War.

Nonetheless, it is certain that the new Cold War climate soon gave a dramatic dimension to some of the debates and that the tensions between Eastern and Western delegates increased in the second half of 1947. As an example we can see

⁹ « Les Etats-Unis auraient voulu faire de ces organisations des sections spécialisées des Nations Unies et les rassembler à New York mais la dispersion géographique et l'autonomie ont prévalu ». GERBET P., GHEBALI V. Y., MOUTON M.-R., *Le rêve d'un ordre mondial: de la SDN à l'ONU*. Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1996, p. 162.

¹⁰ « une constatation générale apparaît immédiatement : c'est que l'esprit dans lequel étaient conclus les vieux traités d'Union n'existe plus ». MAE, NUOI 377 : Maurice Leproux, « Note sur les conférences des télécommunications d'Atlantic City », Atlantic City, 03/08/1947, 4 p., pp. 2-3.

¹¹ Schot and Lagendijk, « Technocratic Internationalism in the Interwar Years: Building Europe on motorways and electricity networks », in *Journal of Modern European History*, 6/2, 2008, pp. 196-217, p. 198.

how the discussion upon the status to give to the Baltic and Mongolian Republics became as soon as July 1947 a source of major conflict.

USSR asked for the acknowledgment of a full member status for each of these Republics – so that it could benefit from a larger number of voices when voting. While France supported USSR for tactical and political reasons, a majority rejected the argument. The vote at the Universal Postal Union Congress in Paris occurred on that matter just at the moment when, also in Paris, the three Foreign Ministers from USSR (Molotov), Great Britain (Bevin) and France (Bidault) met (7th of June to the 2nd of July 1947) to discuss Georges Marshall's offer to rebuild Europe on American funds. The USSR decision to reject the offer signed the official entry into the Cold War era. With a unusual violence in this arena, the Soviet delegation at the Postal Congress denounced « the imperialist states that turn Small nations into slavery »¹². The Bulgarian delegate then expressed its worries « Europe is threatened to be cut into two parts. The same fate is threatening the Postal Union »¹³. The Congress was about to desintegrate. But finally, the Soviets and the Eastern European delegates stayed on board. The same story happened two weeks later in Atlantic City at the Telecommunication Conference. At the occasion of a lunch specially organised with the French, British and American delegates, the Soviets threatened to leave the conference if their claim for a full member status for the Baltic and Mongolian Republics was not satisfied. They were not satisfied, but they did not get out¹⁴.

The ITU did not implose, but the break was not that far... From 1948 onward, technical cooperation was directly put under tough tensions, almost frozen by a strategy of obstruction from the part of the Soviets delegates. USSR and its allies did not quit the organisation and its various committees but they made their work difficult.

Elected president of the Administrative Council for the year 1948, M. Fortuschenko was not there for the opening of the meeting and had let no instructions... Up till the middle of the 1950s, the Soviet attitude would be perceived as « discourteous » by French delegates, at worst violent and at best rude¹⁵. At the 1952 Administrative Council of the ITU, from the 21st of April to the 6th of June, declarations made by the Soviet representative represented on their own around half of the minutes' volume!¹⁶

When considering the radio spectrum regulation, which was indeed the most sensitive field of cooperation in the scope of the ITU by that time, the Soviets strategy was the same. At stake was the assignment of bands of frequencies to certain categories of users (aeronautics, marine, broadcasting, etc) and the possibility for each country to use the spectrum independently but without causing or suffering perturbations to or from the others¹⁷. Set up in 1948, the Frequency Provisory Committee was composed of delegates of the nations and of eleven international civil servants from the newly established International Frequency Registration Board. Its task was to register all the radio stations emitting throughout the world and to give a new position to the ones that were no longer emitting in the appropriate band (following the repartition agreed on during the radio conference at

¹² MAE, Y internationale 80 : direction des Unions, « Note », 05/07/1947, 9 p., p. 6-8.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Only research in Russian archives could give a clear view on the reasons why the USSR delegates decided to stay.

¹⁵ MAE, NUOI 375 : note, June 1954, 4 p., p. 1 (9th session of the ITU 's Administrative Council).

¹⁶ MAE, NUOI 375 : ministère des PTT, à la direction des Unions du ministère des Affaires étrangères, nd, 11 p., p. 2.

¹⁷ HENRICH-FRANKE Christian, *Globale Regulierungsproblematiken in Historischer Perspektive: Der Fall des Funkfrequenzspektrums, 1945-1988*. Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlag, 2006, 358 p.

Atlantic City). The Soviets participated to its work but did not provided the data regarding their stations...

Beside this global arena parallel negotiations regarding frequency regulation were conducted at the regional scale. As far as the region "Europe" was concerned, the Soviet and their satellite countries delegates had always the same attitude: they participated but eventually refused to sign the agreement obtained (Copenhagen conference on broadcasting, June to September 1948¹⁸; Copenhagen regional radio conference on maritime communications, 1948; Geneva administrative conference for radio in Europe, 1949; Geneva radio conference on aeronautical communications, May to September 1948 and August to October 1949).

In October 1949, USSR decided together with five European satellites to get out of the global Frequency Provisory Committee (FPC). The outbreak of the war in Korea in June 1950 brutally stopped the second International HF Broadcasting Conference in Florence and Rapallo. A year later, not surprisingly, the socialist countries condemned the list of frequencies proposed on the base of the FPC work by the Extraordinary Administrative Radio Conference held in Geneva. After, at least, a five year long process aiming at designing a new stable international regulation of the ether usage the outcome was far from being **null** but was much more contested than before the Second World War. The ITU on its all looked extremely fragile.

4. Europe

The Eastern bloc versatile strategy (participation/obstruction) questioned the possible impact of the creation of a new European institution within the ITU that would have accompanied the process of the (Western) European construction: wouldn't it cut the last fragile links between West and East and sign the death of the old universal ITU?

Two political projects were discussed in the years 1949-1953 regarding the creation of a new European institution dealing with postal and telecommunication services. Both defined Europe as Western Europe. One came from the Assembly of the Council of Europe, set up in May 1949 after the congress held in The Hague. The other from the Federal Republic of Germany PTT Minister, Hans Schubert. Both aimed at reinforcing technical cooperation and commercial agreements among national operators in order to strengthen communication ties linking European countries, at a time when they embarked on the European construction.

After some of the French representatives made a proposition to create a postal union issuing a single European stamp, the Economic Commission and then the Assembly of the Council of Europe thus enlarged the project in 1951: it included telephone communications and called for the meeting of a European Post and Telecommunication conference¹⁹. This was part of a larger contemporary endeavour

¹⁸ The organisation dealing with cooperation among European broadcasters (independent from the ITU) was cut into two parts at the beginning of 1950 : the Organisation internationale de radiodiffusion on one side (headquarters in Praha) and the European Broadcasting Union (headquarters in Geneva and Brussels). In that respect it seems to us that it was less the fact of the strategy of the Eastern partners than the one of the British (with the support of the USA) that drove to the clash.

¹⁹ Centre des archives contemporaines (Paris), CAC 920257 / 1: « Rapport sur les relations postales et télécommunications présenté au nom de la Commission des questions économiques par M. Motz », 13/05/1951, 4 p., p. 2. et p. 3.

on the part of the Council to create European authorities guiding sectorial integration –on Agriculture, Transports, Aeronautics or Raw materials²⁰.

In September 1951 in Aachen, Hans Schubert, political head of the FRG *Bundesministerium für das Post und Fernmeldewesen* organised a conference on this matter. His view was may be inspired by F. Hofman, director of the Netherlands Post Office whom proposed the creation of a European Postal Union²¹. But it was above all shaped in a divided Germany and had a clear political goal: for him the danger came from the East, and PTT were « in Europe, the best hyphen which could link all the members of a general Union »²². As far as telecommunication were concerned, he prompted the lowering of tariffs and the development of automatic switching on international trunk lines, the development of radiocommunications on international trains, the coordination of radiocommunication across rivers, canals and airspace. He also put the stress on the utility to coordinate European views before attending to the global ITU conferences. Schubert thought that sovereign states were not ready to give up the control of communication networks to a supranational authority comparable to the one driving the European Coal and Steel Community recently founded. He then proposed to start with a regional European Union within the ITU (and the UPU for postal matters), with a European bureau composed of the very best experts of the continent to manage it. In January 1952, the Bundestag voted a law proposal encouraging the government to defend this project before the Council of Europe.

All of this failed.

Two years later, the final decision taken by the political authority of the Council of Europe, the Ministers Committee, nonetheless buried the project²³. The decision was justified by “a series of obstacles, political as well as technical”. “Technical” meant that the technical ministries in charge of postal and telecommunication network expressed some reserves. The lack of support by national administrations also explained the failure of comparable contemporary projects on agriculture or health. As the historian Pierre Gerbet says: “The political interest (of such projects) was not sufficient for the governments to overcome their divergences and their administrations resistances”²⁴.

In the particular case of telecommunication, the administrations might be reluctant to give up what they were precisely building and managing as a tool of sovereignty recovery. Right after the war, domestic telephone networks were completely nationalised in most of the European countries where private enterprises operated so far (Spain, 1944; Netherlands, Norway: end of urban private concessions). The dynamic was the same as far as international radio or cable operators were

²⁰ ROBERTSON A. H., « The European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations », in *Annuaire européen*, 1959, pp. 100-115, p. 101.

²¹ HOFMAN F. A., «De l'utilité d'une Union postale européenne et de sa tâche », in *L'Union postale*, janvier 1950, pp. 2-5. Reflecting on the geographical scope of this project, the British Post Office concluded : “ it seems clear that the proposed union is envisaged as comprising all the European countries outside the Iron curtain ”. Royal Mail Archives (London) RMA, Post 122 / 506: « Memo », no date nor author, 9 p., p. 3.

²² CAC 920257 / 1: HCRFA, direction générale des affaires économiques, service des PTT, R. Pages au ministre des PTT de France, Baden-Baden, 02/02/1952. Discours de la « conférence des présidents » d'Aix-la-Chapelle en annexe, 22 p., p. 11.

²³ CAC 920257 / 1: Quatrième rapport du Comité des ministres à l'Assemblée consultative du Conseil de l'Europe. Strasbourg, 07/05/1953, 22 p., p. 5.

²⁴ Gerbet P., *La naissance de la construction européenne*. Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1999, 617 p., p. 69.

concerned. For instance, the British Post Office had taken control over the private company *Cable and Wireless* by 1950²⁵.

For public operators priority thus went to the rebuilding of national or imperial networks in the postwar period. In France, the *Direction générale des télécommunications* (telecommunication branch of the PTT), together with a new public research centre dedicated to telecommunication (CNET) progressively elaborated a program of national independence, with both a strong military and industrial dimension. The French telecommunication industry was then said too fragile to be able to count in any kind of European industrial consolidation²⁶. Furthermore, a lowering of the taxes for transeuropean communication would cost a lot, given that it was the most profitable part of the traffic²⁷.

But in fact the projects of European unification discussed were very cautious with sovereignty. If they imagined a possible unique PTT administration for the future in Europe, they promoted first a reinforced cooperation with no form of supranationality. Hence it was something else that prevented national administrations from backing the projects. In its decision the Ministers Committee of the Council of Europe said that "a postal regional union in Western Europe would put cooperation within the UPU at risk, which gathers states from the entire Europe". This declaration focussed on postal matters, but for sure the same worries played for telecommunication matters: East and West were still cooperating through the International Telecommunication Union, or at least socialist countries were still on board the Union whereas they had left from most of the other specialised UN agencies.

The creation of a Western European Union could then cut the last fragile links of an already ill organisation. Indeed this could encourage the creation of an Eastern counterpart worried British and Netherlands partners²⁸. And then the probable desertion by the two Superpowers from the Union.

We think that for many technicians the universal scope of the Union was more valuable by that time than the creation of a (Western) European institution. They probably had a kind of sentimental or philosophical bond to an old institution that was part of their mental landscape and that provided universal standards. In 1945, a Norwegian delegate explained: "every man working for telephone services considers his national network as an integrative part of the network that spans over the universe"²⁹. Back from Atlantic City, a French delegate saw with a lot of suspicion the burgeoning of regional Unions within the global framework of the ITU. When legislating, he said, « we must go from the universal to the particular, to be sure that particularism won't win over universalism »³⁰. They also probably had a professional

²⁵ Millward Robert, *Private and Public Enterprise in Europe : Energy, Telecommunications and Transport, 1830-1990*. Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2005, 351 p., p. 245.

²⁶ If the télécommunication industry was to be organised at the European scale « la situation de l'industrie française ne se trouverait pas favorable, dans l'immédiat, en raison de la cherté relative des prix de revient de ce secteur de production ». CAC 920257 / 1 : Masson, « Note sur la création d'une communauté européenne des Postes et Télécommunications », 31/10/1952, 15 p., p. 12.

²⁷ In the case of France, the loss is estimated between 250 and 300 millions of Francs. CAC 920257 / 1 : Masson, « note sur la création d'une communauté européenne des Postes et Télécommunications », 31/10/1952, 15 p., p. 13.

²⁸ CAC 920257 / 1 : « Création d'une union postale entre les Etats membres du Conseil de l'Europe. Analyse des réponses des Etats », sd, ni auteur.

²⁹ Rynning-Tonnesen. Comité consultatif international téléphonique (CCIF), XIIIe Assemblée plénière, London, 29-30/10/1945. Paris, CCIF, 216 p., p. 14.

³⁰ MAE, NUOI 377 : « Rapport à Monsieur le secrétaire d'Etat sur les résultats de la conférence d'Atlantic City », no date nor author, 22 p., pp. 16-17.

ethos that prevented them, as communication networks managers, from deepening the cut between East and West. Some at last also saw a strategic interest in the survival of the ITU: as well as the UPU it was already a framework for European cooperation but with its results universalised, or to say it differently influencing the entire world regulation of communications. In this view, anything weakening the Unions would weaken Europe at some point. As a British postal expert said in 1951:

“ The fact is that the UPU largely already, by means of the strength and tradition of European membership (...) fills the gap which might otherwise exist to be filled by a Western European Union as such. It is no doubt for this reason that all previous proposals for a similar Union have come to nothing -except Hitler's; and that only lasted as long as he did. It might even be said that an unspoken motive of the Pan American and Spanish Union was that the orientation of the UPU is too European”³¹.

We haven't found such clear statement regarding the ITU. But several clues show that the general feeling was close. The ITU was said to be « certainly one of the specialised UN institutions where the French position is the strongest »³². It was particularly the case within the branch of the ITU dealing with telephone and telegraph networks interconnection. In 1956, the French *Directeur général des télécommunications*, Jean Rouvière said « One could not (...) silence that within the CCIF and the CCIT Western European countries are practically holding the essential roles and driving these organisms' activity and recommendations »³³.

5. Conclusion

Between their fidelity to a kind of “technocratic internationalism”³⁴ privileging apolitism and universalism and a priority for national concerns, it seems that few European engineers gave support to the first political promoters of a European specialised institution dealing with telecommunication matters on the aftermath of the Second World War. No such institution was to be born on the early period of the European construction.

It was the French PTT minister Edouard Bonnefous skill to associate to, and even put the experts and technicians at the head of, his project of a PTT European Union in 1955. The context was far more favourable by that time. A window was opened: soon after Stalin's death, Eastern bloc delegates had a radically new attitude toward their Western colleagues. At the International Radiocommunications Committee the Soviet delegation for instance was said to be « conciliatory and binding»³⁵. This feeling was confirmed a year later, in 1954 at the ITU administrative council where Soviet interventions were « often constructive »³⁶. Their leaving from the ITU or UPU became less probable. Hence the creation of a European institution became less

³¹ RMA, POST 122 / 506 : M. Locke, GPO, to Miss Armstrong, General Department, Foreign Office, (London, 27/07/1951), draft.

³² MAE, NUOI 375 : « La position française à l'UIT. Note remise par M. Mulatier à M. Toussaint », 2/10/1952, 3 p., p. 1.

³³ CAC, 920257 / 2: « Note pour le Secrétariat général par le directeur général des Télécommunications Rouvière », 24/10/1956.

³⁴ Schot J., Lagendijk V., *op. cit.*

³⁵ CCIR Plenary Assembly, London, 2/09 to 7/10 of October 1953. MAE, NUOI 376 : directions des Unions, Note 1, 17/09/1953, 4 p., p. 2.

³⁶ MAE, NUOI 375 : note, June 1954, 4 p., p. 1 (9th session of the ITU 's Administrative Council).

problematic. After the Messina conference (1955), the very first common initiatives by the PTT of the Six provoked the creation of an Eastern counterpart, but neither the ITU nor the UPU exploded. A very important argument against the formal creation of a Western European institution disappeared. And a new one appeared in favour of it: while many regional Unions were born since the end of the war and were solidary when negotiating in global negotiations, Western Europe was too divided to keep its influence. In 1959 the European Conference of Post and Telecommunication Administrations was founded by 19 countries and soon became a regional Union within the universal ones. It was to be an important forum in Europe for technical and operational cooperation which counts, among its multiple legacies, the GSM standard.