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Union Activities

ITU's Plenipotentiary Conference

The Plenipotentiary Conference of the ITU will open in the Kenyatta Conference Centre, Nairobi (Kenya), on 28 September. The Conference will last six weeks until 5 November.

50th Anniversary of the Madrid Conferences

On the eve of the Plenipotentiary Conference which will open in Nairobi this month we commemorate one of the most decisive events of the Union's history.

The 13th International Telegraph Conference and the 4th International Radiotelegraph Conference opened simultaneously in Madrid on 3 September 1932.

The principal item on the agenda of the two conferences was the fusion of the International Telegraph Convention with the International Radiotelegraph Convention which had been suggested at the Paris Telegraph Conference of 1925.

Mr. Santiago Casares Quiroga, Spanish Minister of the Interior, was elected Chairman of the two conferences whilst Dr. Räber, Director of the Bureau of the International Telegraph Union, was appointed the Chairman's Counsellor and Mr. Schwill, Vice-Director of the Bureau, was appointed Secretary-General. Since the two conferences were juridically separate, a liaison was achieved, for the consideration of questions in common, by means of ten joint meetings of the two Plenary Assemblies and by the establishment of a Joint Convention Committee and a Joint Committee on the Right to Vote.

Neither the Paris Telegraph Conference of 1925 nor the Washington Radiotelegraph Conference of 1927 had recommended the calling of a preliminary conference or group to prepare a draft convention, so the initiative rested with the interested governments, organizations and individuals. Complete drafts of a single convention were submitted to the Madrid Conferences by Greece, Italy, the Bureau of the Union and the *Comité international de la télégraphie sans fil*, whilst 17 other administrations had submitted comments and proposals of a more specific nature.

In 1930 the *Journal télégraphique* had published a draft convention for a combined Union prepared by Mr. Boulanger (then Vice-Director of the International Bureau) on his own responsibility.¹ The text aroused considerable comment and many governments sent in observations. The draft was republished in 1932 taking account of the observations submitted.² The Joint Convention Committee of the Madrid Conferences expressed its appreciation of the work done by Mr. Boulanger and decided to use his second draft as a basis for discussion.

The Convention adopted in Madrid, after the problems of unification and relationships of the service regulations to the convention had been settled, was an expert combination of the 1927 Radiotelegraph Convention and the 1875 Telegraph Convention. No major innovations were introduced and most articles remained quite general in their scope.

A minor controversy arose over the choice of a name for the new Union. One group insisted that the word 'telegraph' be retained in the title, others requested that the title mention all three services, and several suggested that it be called the "International Communications Union". In order to keep the name relatively short, to include all three services and to give preference to none, even for historical reasons, the name selected was the "International Telecommunication Union". The following definition was adopted for the new term telecommunication: "Any telegraph or telephone communication of signs, signals, writings, images, and sounds of any nature, by wire, radio, or other systems or processes of electric or visual (semaphore) signalling".

The Madrid Radio Regulations

The General Radio Regulations, annexed to the Madrid Telecommunication Convention, were drawn up exclusively by the Madrid Radiotelegraph Conference. The new regulations were based on the Washington Radiotelegraph Regulations of 1927, and except for a few modifications were essentially the same. It is interesting to note that, in recognition of the evolution of radio, the word telegraphy was eliminated from the title (in French the title became *Règlement général des radiocommunications*).

¹ *Journal télégraphique*, Vol. 54, No. 6, pages 117-125 (June 1930).

² *Journal télégraphique*, Vol. 56, No. 6, pages 153-163 (June 1932).

Allocation and use of frequencies

A great deal of interest and a large amount of discussion were devoted to Article 7 (Washington Article 5) dealing with the allocation table and rules pertaining to the use of frequencies. Over 200 proposals were submitted for changes in this article by 22 countries and four international organizations.

As at Washington (1927), the band of frequencies that caused the most difficulty lay between 150 and 1500 kHz, especially as concerned the European area. Although the discovery of short waves had opened up a great new territory, it was found that for certain rapidly expanding services, mainly broadcasting and aeronautical, more space in the medium- and short-wave bands was indispensable.

Once the troublesome low and medium bands had been taken care of, little difficulty was encountered in the remainder of the allocation plan. One of the more important aspects of the plan as a whole was that the clause describing it as a "guide" was eliminated. Henceforth, administrations "agreed to assign frequencies... in conformity with the table of allocation of frequencies". It is also significant to note that the upper limit of the allocation table was extended from 22 300 to 28 000 kHz.

Attempts were also made at Madrid to ensure that all stations be operated in accordance with good engineering practice. For this purpose a table of tolerances and a table giving the acceptable bandwidths for various types of emissions were inserted. These two tables were to serve as guides for measuring the merits of radio stations and to draw the attention of administrations to the need for more careful regulations for transmitting stations.

Registration of frequencies

In a further attempt to cut down on harmful interference and to persuade countries not to use frequencies outside the proper band, the provisions relating to the registration of frequencies were strengthened. In the future, any country deciding to put a radio station in operation was obliged to notify the International Bureau "before the frequency is put into service and sufficiently in advance thereof to allow administrations to take any action which they may deem necessary to ensure the efficient operation of their services".

In order that administrations would know when to take action to ensure efficient operation, the International Bureau was requested to publish all notifications of new stations or changes in power.

Regulation of the maritime mobile service

The Madrid Radiotelegraph Conference brought about several changes in the regulation of the maritime mobile service. Not only was the distress frequency, 500 kHz,

given more protection in the allocation table and in the rules for allocation, but the use of this frequency for regular traffic was further reduced.

A radiotelephone service, for use between small fishing boats operating in the fishing grounds in the vicinity of Europe, had grown to a considerable extent in the band 1500 to 2000 kHz since the Washington Conference. In order to provide for its orderly development, an exclusive band of frequencies for the European region was provided for carrying on communication and a general calling wave was established.

The Madrid Telegraph Regulations

The Telegraph Regulations, annexed to the Madrid Telecommunication Convention, were drawn up exclusively by the Madrid Telegraph Conference. The new regulations were based on the Paris Telegraph Regulations of 1925. In contrast to the Radiotelegraph Conference, the points on which the greatest amount of discussion occurred related to primarily economic considerations.

The Madrid Telephone Regulations

The Telephone Regulations, annexed to the Madrid Telecommunication Convention, were drawn up by the Madrid Telegraph Conference. Two important changes were made in the new Telephone Regulations:

- 1) their application was limited to the European telephone system,
- 2) they were taken out of the Telegraph Regulations and placed in a separate document.

Conclusion

The official closing ceremony of the two conferences took place on Friday 9 December 1932 in the presence of the President of the Spanish Republic, Mr. Niceto Alcalá Zamora.

A little over a year later, on 1 January 1934, the new International Telecommunication Convention came into force, the foundation for our modern International Telecommunication Union.

Editor's note

We are grateful to Professor George A. Coddling for permission to use passages from his book. *The International Telecommunication Union* (New York, Arno Press Inc., 1972). Our article is also based on the documents of the two conferences and reports published in the *Journal télégraphique*.
