



# LUND UNIVERSITY

## From an Inclusive to an Exclusive International Order: Membership of International Organisations from the 19th to the 20th Century

Ravndal, Ellen

2016

*Document Version:*  
Other version

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Ravndal, E. (2016). *From an Inclusive to an Exclusive International Order: Membership of International Organisations from the 19th to the 20th Century*. (STANCE Working Paper Series; Vol. 2016, No. 8). Department of Political Science, Lund University.

*Total number of authors:*  
1

### General rights

Unless other specific re-use rights are stated the following general rights apply:

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Read more about Creative commons licenses: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00

# STANCE

State-Making and the Origins of Global Order  
in the Long Nineteenth Century and Beyond

From an Inclusive to an  
Exclusive International Order:  
Membership of International Organisations  
from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Ellen Ravndal

Working Paper Series, 2016:8  
STANCE, Lund University



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

STANCE is a six-year research program at the Department of Political Science at Lund University, Sweden. The program, consisting of several separate but connected research projects, aims to answer the question of how state-making and the international system co-evolved in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century (1789-1914) and beyond. The program is constructed around three research themes: (1) How did the different dimensions of state-making evolve? What actors and organized interests supported or put up resistance to these processes?; (2) How were these dimensions of state-making affected by geopolitical competition, warfare and the diffusion of novel political technologies?; and (3) What were the consequences for the international system, both with respect to the type of state that emerged and what entities were granted membership in the state system? The program aims to bridge the gaps between comparative politics and IR, as well as those between the study of political thought and positive empirical political science. The research has been made possible by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond). Visit the research program's website at [www.stanceatlund.org](http://www.stanceatlund.org)

Please address comments and/or queries for information to:

*Email address:* [info@stanceatlund.org](mailto:info@stanceatlund.org)

*Mailing address:* STANCE  
Department of Political Science  
Lund University  
Box 52, SE-221 00 Lund, Sweden

In Series 2016:

1. "STATE CAPACITY AS POWER: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK", Johannes Lindvall and Jan Teorell
2. "THE LAY OF THE LAND: INFORMATION CAPACITY AND THE MODERN STATE", Thomas Brambor, Agustín Goenaga, Johannes Lindvall, and Jan Teorell
3. "STEPPE STATE MAKING", Martin Hall
4. "WAR, PERFORMANCE AND THE SURVIVAL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS", Hanna Bäck, Jan Teorell, and Alexander von Hagen-Jamar
5. "THE NATION-STATE AS FAILURE: NATIONALISM AND MOBILITY, IN INDIA AND ELSEWHERE", Erik Ringmar
6. "CABINETS, PRIME MINISTERS, AND CORRUPTION. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENTS", Hanna Bäck, Staffan Lindberg, and Jan Teorell
7. "SOCIAL POLICY AND MIGRATION POLICY IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY", Sara Kalm and Johannes Lindvall
8. "FROM AN INCLUSIVE TO AN EXCLUSIVE INTERNATIONAL ORDER: MEMBERSHIP OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS FROM THE 19<sup>TH</sup> TO THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY", Ellen Ravndal

STANCE working papers are available in electronic format at [www.stanceatlund.org](http://www.stanceatlund.org)

COPYRIGHT © 2016 by authors. All rights reserved.

# From an Inclusive to an Exclusive International Order

## Membership of International Organisations

from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>1</sup>

---

Ellen Ravndal  
Post Doc in Political Science  
Lund University

### Abstract

Recent scholarship in IR has increasingly focused on the “global transformation” of the 19th century. Many of the defining features of modern IR first emerged in the 19th century, among them a new group of actors – international organisations. Yet the intergovernmental organisations (IGO) of the late 19th and early 20th century were not identical to the IGOs of the post-1945 period. 19th century IGOs included semi-sovereigns and colonies as individual members alongside sovereign states, and they therefore represent “an alternative mode of international order,” a more inclusive one. By the mid-20th century, as represented by the formation of the United Nations and its confirmation of the principle of sovereign equality of all its members, this earlier inclusive order had been replaced by a more exclusive one. How did this transformation from an inclusive to an exclusive international order play out? How did the IGOs established in the 19th century with an inclusive membership policy deal with the shift to an international order based on the primacy of the sovereign state? This paper traces the changes in membership in the International Telegraph (Telecommunications) Union (ITU) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU), both among the very first IGOs of the 19th century and both still alive and well in the 21st century. The paper examines debates about membership and membership categories in these organisations and the arguments used on either side of the debate.

---

<sup>1</sup> Paper prepared for presentation at the workshop ‘States and their Making – International and Comparative Perspectives’ in Lund, 19-20 May 2016

# I Introduction

The emergence and consolidation of the international system remains one of the central questions of International Relations (IR). The simple story of the spread of the sovereign state and the international system built around it is this: In Europe in the 17th century – key dates are the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 or the Treaty of Utrecht of 1712-15 – the modern state as we know it was born.<sup>2</sup> This state differed from earlier political organisations in claiming exclusive jurisdiction and monopoly of violence in/over its territory and people and refusing to recognise any external higher authority. This concept is known as state sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> The nation-state became the dominant actor in Europe during the 19th century with the unification of Germany and Italy. In the 20th century the international system became truly global through the inclusion of formerly peripheral states in the Americas and Asia as well as the process of imperialism followed by decolonization. Today the entire world is divided up among the sovereign states, all 193 of which are members of the United Nations (UN). Despite the contradictory trends of globalization, the sovereign state remains the primary actor in the international system, which continues to be characterised by anarchy.

Recent scholarship has displayed the shortcomings and inaccuracies of this narrative on many accounts. One problem is how to deal with the difference between ‘nation-states’ and ‘empires.’ World historians have shown that empires were the dominant actors for most of the modern period. During the late 19th century existing empires expanded to encompass the entire world, and the key actors in international relations during the period – Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Turkey – were actual or aspiring multi-ethnic empires rather than nation-states. Instead of thinking of the 19th century as ‘the age of the nation-state,’ it would therefore be more correct to use the label ‘the age of empire.’<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, if we examine which entities were allowed to act at the international level the picture becomes more complicated. Many of the early colonies were established not by states but by private companies: the British East India Company and the Dutch Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie gradually conquered what later became India and Indonesia during the 17th and 18th centuries. As late as 1885, years after the British and Dutch governments had taken the place of the earlier companies in Asia, the Belgian King Leopold

---

<sup>2</sup> See Andreas Osiander, *The States System of Europe, 1640-1990: Peacemaking and the Conditions of International Stability* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 162-65.

<sup>3</sup> The basic textbook definition of sovereignty is that a state (or ruler) is sovereign if they accept “no internal, ‘domestic’ equals” and “no external, ‘international’ superiors.” Chris Brown and Kirsten Ainley, *Understanding International Relations*, 4th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 127.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), ch. 8.

It acquired a vast territory on the Congo River for himself, establishing the Congo Free State. City-states still existed in the 19th century. And even in Europe the distinction between sovereign states as included members of the international system and non-sovereign others as excluded was far from clear-cut. The first universal intergovernmental organisation (IGO) – the International Telegraph Union created in 1865 – quickly recognised Norway and Hungary as independent members of the union, although neither of them counted as fully sovereign states by the definition of sovereignty in use at the time.

IGOs offer a good way of measuring membership of the international system. Current IGOs by definition have sovereign states as members. IGOs share three basic features: they “1) are founded by states with an explicit interstate treaty, 2) have states as their members, and 3) have independent corporate personality so they exist as autonomous legal actors distinct from their members.”<sup>5</sup> Having states (or other IGOs) as members is what separates IGOs from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs).<sup>6</sup> The lack of state members is also the reason why the International Red Cross, despite being established as the result of an interstate treaty, is normally considered an INGO. We also find this distinction between IGOs and other forms of international organisation among early observers of international relations. Reinsch, for example, separated public international unions, which had governments or states as members, from private international unions where individuals were members.<sup>7</sup> Today membership of IGOs has even become one of the criteria for judging whether an entity is a sovereign state. With a few politically controversial exceptions, all sovereign states are members of the United Nations, and UN membership has become a proxy for sovereign statehood. “Admission to the very United Nations establishes a strong presumption that an entity is a state. After all, how could it possibly have been admitted otherwise?”<sup>8</sup> Membership of IGOs (or earlier public international unions) can therefore be used as a measure of statehood and membership of the international system.

Based on a study of two IGOs in the 19th century, Howland recently concluded that these entities “posed a striking alternative to the international society of great powers, sovereignty, and forms of imperial domination” because they included “semi-sovereigns, vassals, and colonies” as members.<sup>9</sup> IGOs today have abandoned this inclusive membership philosophy. The UN Charter of 1945 explicitly confirmed that the organization would be

---

<sup>5</sup> Ian Hurd, “Choices and Methods in the Study of International Organizations,” *Journal of International Organizations Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 7. See also Jan Klabbers, *An Introduction to International Organizations Law*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 6-14.

<sup>6</sup> “FAQ – What is an intergovernmental organization (IGO)?” <http://www.uia.org/yearbook> (accessed 10.11.15)

<sup>7</sup> Paul S. Reinsch, *Public International Unions: Their Work and Organization* (Boston and London: Ginn & Company, 1911), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Klabbers, *An Introduction to International Organizations Law*, 92.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Howland, “An alternative mode of international order: The international administrative union in the nineteenth century,” *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 161.

based on “the principle of sovereign equality of all its Members,”<sup>10</sup> and over the next few decades the process of decolonisation confirmed the primacy of sovereign states in the international system. How did this transition from an inclusive to an exclusive international order take place? How did the IGOs established in the 19th century with an inclusive membership policy deal with the shift to an international order based on the primacy of the sovereign state?

This paper traces changes in membership of IGOs from the 19th to the mid-20th century and analyses internal debates in two prominent IGOs to capture the arguments used for or against including non-sovereign members. The two case studies are the International Telegraph (later Telecommunications) Union (ITU), the first universal IGO established in 1865, and its close relative the Universal Postal Union (UPU), founded in 1874. Both organisations quickly grew to encompass a diverse and geographically widespread membership in the last decades of the 19th century; both saw intense debate over membership categories in the interwar period; and both have abandoned the earlier inclusive membership strategy and today compose respectively 193 and 192 sovereign member states. Furthermore, the ITU and the UPU are typical examples of the first IGOs created in the 19th century – technical cooperation made necessary by new technology and growing transnational contact during the industrial revolution<sup>11</sup> – and as such might serve as a good starting point for a general study of IGO membership in the period.

The paper starts by illustrating the inclusive membership of IGOs in the late 19th century and demonstrating how the phenomenon changed over time. It then progresses chronologically through three phases of debate within the ITU and UPU: the initial establishment of the IGO and growth in membership in the decades prior to the First World War, increasing conflicts and protests against the inclusive membership policy in the interwar period, and finally, the end of inclusive membership and victory of the sovereignty criterion after 1945.

---

<sup>10</sup> *UN Charter*, article 2(1).

<sup>11</sup> Craig N. Murphy, *International Organization and Industrial Change: Global Governance since 1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

## II Trends in IGO membership

The first IGOs did not have the same exclusive definition of membership as later scholars have applied when studying the phenomenon. When we today look back at the IGOs of the 19th century and apply our definitions of 'state' and 'IGO,' we risk distorting the picture of membership. Indeed, this has happened in the only existing comprehensive dataset on IGO membership. To my knowledge, the only dataset on IGO membership to cover the 19th century is the Correlates of War "International Governmental Organizations Data Set." The first version of the dataset was developed by Wallace and Singer in the 1960s,<sup>12</sup> and a second version was published by Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke in 2004.<sup>13</sup> The dataset was assembled in two steps, first by identifying a list of IGOs to be included, and second by identifying the members of each IGO in a given period (every five years for 1815-1965, every year since then). Leaving aside possible problems with defining what an IGO is and which should be eligible for inclusion in the study, a significant problem for discussing membership of IGOs appears during the second step of the process. As Wallace and Singer explains: "identification of nation membership in the total international system [is] an essential prerequisite to identification of each organization's membership."<sup>14</sup> That is, only entities already identified as 'states' by some objective criteria, count as members of an IGO, regardless of whom the IGO itself might claim to have as members. In the Correlates of War dataset an entity will qualify for system-membership if it has "the standard attributes of national sovereignty." Additionally, for the period prior to WW1, the entity must have a minimum population of at least 500,000, and diplomatic recognition, with missions at or above the *chargé d'affaires* rank, from both the UK and France. For the post-1919 period, there is no population requirement, but the entity must still be diplomatically recognised either by any two major powers or through membership of the League of Nations or the United Nations.<sup>15</sup> Such criteria make sense if the purpose is to use IGO membership alongside other variables to study phenomena inside the international system, predefined as a system of sovereign states. However, if our purpose is to examine more fundamental questions about how the international system is constituted and who its members are, we cannot operate with such a priori definitions.

Another way of assessing membership of IGOs is to actually take the organisations themselves as authorities. We can assess who the members of an organisation are by looking

---

<sup>12</sup> Michael Wallace and J. David Singer, "Intergovernmental Organization in the Global System, 1815-1964: A Quantitative Description," *International Organization* 24, no. 2 (1970).

<sup>13</sup> Jon Pevehouse and Timothy Nordstrom, "Codebook for Correlates of War 2: International Governmental Organizations Data Set Version 2.1," 9 Dec 2003; Jon Pevehouse, Timothy Nordstrom, and Kevin Warnke, "The Correlates of War 2 International Governmental Organizations Data Version 2.0," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 21, no. 2 (2004).

<sup>14</sup> Wallace and Singer, "Intergovernmental Organization, 1815-1964," 249.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



at which entities sent delegations to the plenary conferences and signed the re-negotiated convention at the end of the session. There are several reasons why participation in conferences and signatures of conventions can be used as a measure of membership. First, IGOs are customarily established on the basis of a treaty, and the states that sign and ratify this treaty are often known as ‘original members’ of the organisation.<sup>16</sup> Second, the general conference of the organisation is its highest decision-making organ where all members have the right of representation and vote. Signing the convention or the final protocol of the conference is a privilege of membership. ‘Observers’ or ‘associate members’ may have the right to participate in the conference, but not the right to vote or sign the convention.<sup>17</sup> Third, the Correlates of War dataset described above also used delegations to conferences as a criterion for measuring membership, and considered it a good way “to avoid legalistic interpretations of membership” and “considering ... actual participation in the organization’s plenary and activities.”<sup>18</sup> Lastly, the two organisations under study here, the ITU and the UPU, operated with distinctions between different delegations to the conference that revealed which entities were considered as ‘full’ members of the organisation. ITU conference protocols for certain years list three different categories of delegations: member states (“étaient”) are listed first, followed by representatives of ‘countries that are not yet members of the organisation’ (“pays n’appartiennent pas encore à l’Union télégraphique”) and representatives from private companies (“Sociétés privées”).<sup>19</sup> It is possible for a member to decline to send a delegation or not to sign the convention in a given year, but it is impossible for a non-member to do those things. Delegations and signatories are therefore a conservative measure of IGO membership.

If we simply count the number of delegations/signatories to IGO conventions, the result we get is strikingly different from existing statistical data on IGO membership in the 19th century. The figure below presents information on membership in the UPU from its founding in 1874 until 1906 based on delegations/signatories of UPU conventions. This inclusive data is contrasted with the number of members recognised by the Correlates of War dataset for the years closest to the convention. This gives an indication of the number and importance of non-sovereign members in the organisation.

---

<sup>16</sup>Philippe Sands and Pierre Klein, *Bowett's Law of International Institutions*, 5th ed. (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 2001), 534.

<sup>17</sup> Klabbers, *An Introduction to International Organizations Law*, 96-99.

<sup>18</sup> Wallace and Singer, "Intergovernmental Organization, 1815-1964," 257.

<sup>19</sup> Documents de la Conférence Télégraphique Internationale de Budapest (Berne, 1897), 473-480.

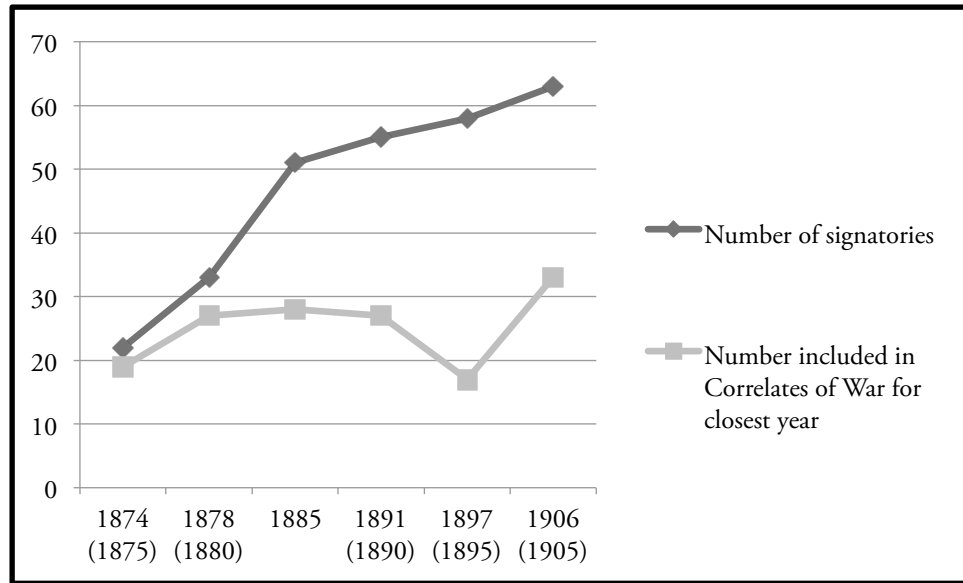


Fig. 1: UPU membership, 1874-1906<sup>20</sup>

This figure shows that the number of UPU members varies significantly depending on whether we use an inclusive measure of simply counting the number of delegations signing the convention at the organisation's general conference, or an exclusive measure which only counts members if they are previously recognised as sovereign states. For the year 1905/1906 the difference represents nearly a doubling of the UPU membership. The Correlates of War dataset reports 33 members of the UPU in 1905, but 63 delegations signed the convention at the organisation's 1906 conference. It is also worth noting at this point that the gap increased substantially in the 1880s. This corresponds to the period when the European great powers finally divided up the remainder of the African and Asian continents between themselves. Many of the new members in the UPU were colonies, either individually or collectively. Imperialism and great power politics thus provides one important explanation for the growth of IGO membership in the 1880s, but it does not tell the whole story.

The figure below presents the results of the same exercise performed for the ITU over a longer time period of the first 100 years of the organisation's existence. It gives the same impression as figure 1 for the late 19th century and confirms that IGO membership at this point in time was not the exclusive preserve of sovereign states. Both figures show that the gap between exclusive and inclusive membership grew in the 1880s and 1890s. Figure 2, which covers a longer timespan, further reveals that the gap narrowed in the interwar period, but did not really disappear until the 1960s.

<sup>20</sup> Source: UPU Conventions of Berne (1874), Paris (1878), Lisbon (1885), Vienna (1891), Washington (1897), and Rome (1906), and Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke, "COW-2 IGO Data 2.0."

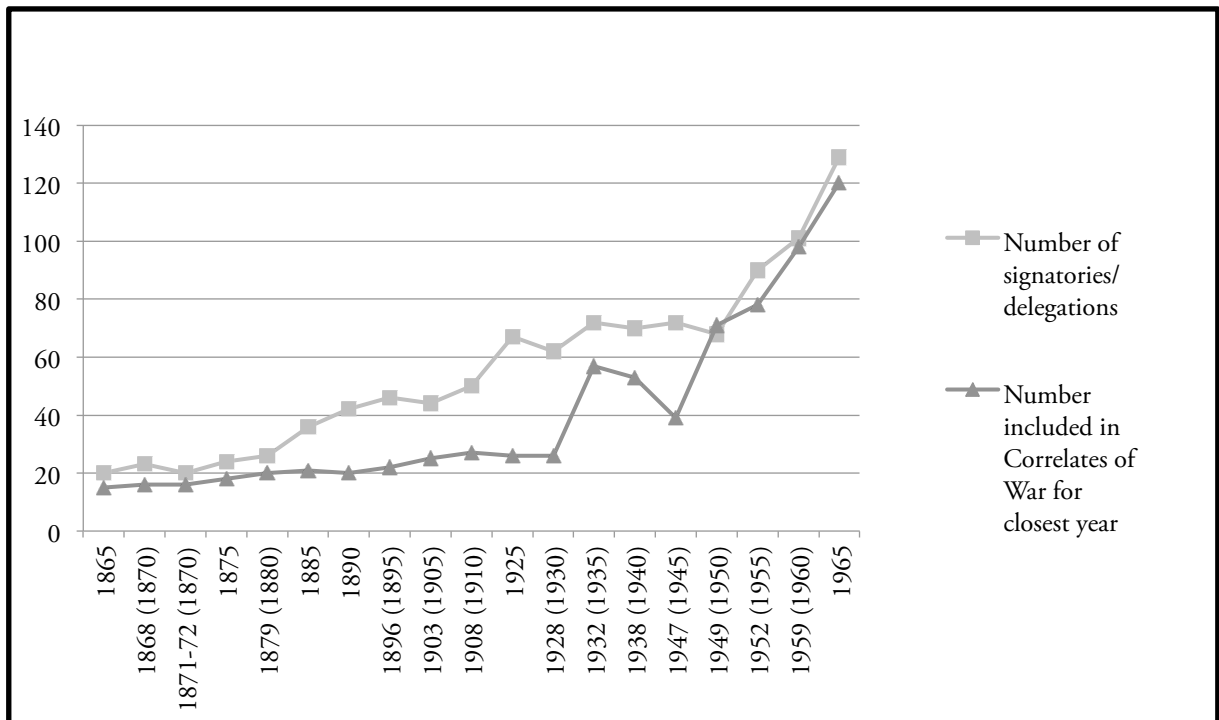


Fig. 2: ITU membership, 1865-1965<sup>21</sup>

Who were these additional members of the UPU and ITU not recognised as sovereign states? Some were colonies belonging to Britain, France and other colonial powers. British India actually joined the ITU before Britain itself was granted membership, because the telegraph administration in India was publicly owned, while telegraph services in Britain proper were in private hands.<sup>22</sup> As the next sections will show, competition between colonial powers to secure additional votes explains part of the difference between the two membership figures. Additionally a number of entities with domestic autonomy and partial independence were admitted as ordinary members of these IGOs. Norway, Hungary, Luxembourg, and Montenegro held separate memberships in IGOs, as did Egypt, Tunisia, and the Congo Free State. The importance of these semi-sovereign members will be discussed later.

<sup>21</sup> Source: ITU Conference Documents from Paris (1865), Vienna (1868), Rome (1871-72), St Petersburg (1875), London (1879), Berlin (1885), Paris (1890), Budapest (1896), London (1903), Lisbon (1908), Paris (1925), Brussels (1928), Madrid (1932), Cairo (1938), Atlantic City (1947), Paris (1949), Buenos Aires (1952), Geneve (1959), and Montreux (1965), and Pevehouse, Nordstrom and Warnke, "COW-2 IGO Data 2.0."

<sup>22</sup> Howland, "An alternative mode of international order," 170.

### III Inclusive membership in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

In the interest of attracting new members to facilitate international telegraph- and postal services in all parts of the world, both the ITU and the UPU from the start chose very open membership policies. The 1865 ITU convention simply said that any state (“état”) not a party to the convention could adhere to it at their demand. Such adhesion should be notified through diplomatic channels to the government that had hosted the previous conference, and that government would then notify all other members. To adhere to the convention would automatically entail accession to all obligations and admission to all advantages of the convention.<sup>23</sup> One of the benefits of membership was the right to vote during conferences. Each member state could send more than one delegate, but the delegation would only have one vote regardless of its size.<sup>24</sup> In this the membership and voting policies of the ITU were typical of the new IGOs created in the 19th century. Although some IGOs had more complicated membership application procedures or were limited geographically, the general principle was towards open membership. As one contemporary observer noted:

The common law of international unions may therefore be stated to be that the unions are open to all nations who are ready to assume the burdens imposed, and that accession of all civilized countries will be encouraged. The purposes of these unions can of course be fulfilled best with a complete membership, including all the states of the world.<sup>25</sup>

In recognition of the equality of the sovereign states present, each state was given one vote and conferences tended towards taking decisions by unanimous consent. The unanimity principle at this time was a kind of customary law of nations. “No legal obligation could be imposed upon a sovereign state against its will; unanimity, in fact, was regarded both as a necessary consequence of sovereignty and as the best protection for it.”<sup>26</sup> But the ITU (and the UPU) were unusual in relaxing this requirement. Although both organisations preferred to take decisions unanimously, if an issue came to the vote, a simple majority was enough to adopt it.<sup>27</sup> But on the other hand, decisions by the ITU and the UPU, like those by other IGOs, were not binding on the member states. States had to ratify conventions before

---

<sup>23</sup> ITU Paris Convention (1865), art. 60.

<sup>24</sup> “Projet de règlement des conférences,” art. 11, *Documents de la Conférence Télégraphique Internationale de Rome (1871-72)*, 87.

<sup>25</sup> Reinsch, *Public International Unions*, 149.

<sup>26</sup> F. S. L. Lyons, *Internationalism in Europe, 1815-1914* (Leyden: A. W. Sythoff, 1963), 23.

<sup>27</sup> “Projet de règlement des conférences,” art. 12, *Documents de la Conférence Télégraphique Internationale de Rome (1871-72)*, 87; George A. Coddington, *The Universal Postal Union: Coordinator of the International Mails* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 141-42.

they would enter into force, and they were also allowed to register reservations.<sup>28</sup> The ITU was thus founded on the principle of sovereign equality among its members.

Although the ITU was founded on the principles of the sovereign state, this would not prevent it from allowing semi-sovereign states and even colonies to become members. In this the practices of the organisation would create tensions within the concept of sovereignty. The question of votes for colonies first came up during the 1871-72 conference. Britain, at first, was not a member of the ITU because its telegraph services were in private hands, but the telegraph administration in British India was government-run, and therefore eligible for membership. On this basis Britain was invited to attend the 1868 conference in Vienna, and at the end of the conference it signed the convention in the name of British India. By the time of the next conference in Rome in 1871-72, Britain had nationalised its domestic telegraph services, and therefore decided to send two delegations to Rome, one for Britain and one for British India, and demanded that each be given a separate vote.<sup>29</sup> The question of votes for Britain was first considered on 2 December 1871 alongside a general suggestion by the German delegation for a system of weighted voting based on the number of telegraph administrations a delegation represented. Opponents of changing the current system of one state, one vote, pointed out that this was a political question that lay outside the jurisdiction of the assembled conference. The conference could only discuss technical questions, and would have to accept the governments' decisions on representational and voting issues. The Belgian delegate pointed out that there would be disadvantages to adopting a procedure which would allow each state to create additional votes for itself. If Britain was allowed a second vote, other states with more than one telegraph administration would claim the same privilege. There would be serious difficulty in deciding where to draw the line, and to avoid such trouble down the road, it would be better to stick with the current practice. Those arguing in favour of changing the procedure claimed that this was to confuse two different questions. The Austro-Hungarian delegate was of the opinion that it would be possible to allow different telegraph administrations to vote separately on technical questions, while the political issue would remain unchanged through continuing the practice of having diplomatic representatives – only one per state – sign the final convention. At the end of this first discussion, the question was left undecided, as the conference awaited a telegram from the British government to declare its intentions.<sup>30</sup>

At the next meeting on 6 December, an Italian official read out the telegram received from the British government where it officially claimed two separate votes for Britain and India. The official went on to observe that this essentially left the question open, as the conference had no authority to address such political questions.<sup>31</sup> The next colonial power

---

<sup>28</sup> Lyons, *Internationalism*, 25-28.

<sup>29</sup> George A. Coddington and Anthony M. Rutkowski, *The International Telecommunication Union in a Changing World* (Dedham, MA: Artech House, 1982), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Documents de la Conférence Télégraphique Internationale de Rome (1871-72), 223-225.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

to put forward a claim for increased representation was the Netherlands, which a few days later designated its delegate as a representative both of the Netherlands and the Dutch Indies.<sup>32</sup> However, the Netherlands stated that it did not wish to exercise its second vote during the present conference, merely to reserve its right to do so in the future.<sup>33</sup> These developments elicited no further debate from the assembled delegates. They were there to discuss technical issues, and accepted these government decisions on political matters as the final word. One change was noticeable, however, in the addition of both India and the Dutch Indies to the article listing each member state's contribution to the International Bureau's budget. India was placed in the first class alongside the largest states contributing the biggest share of the budget. The Dutch Indies was allocated to the third (of six) classes.<sup>34</sup> Thus from this point onwards India and the Dutch Indies would be treated as full members of the ITU, fulfilling all duties of membership and enjoying all its benefits. With this the stage was set for further debate on the issue at the next ITU conference.

It is interesting to note the silence on another question during these discussions in Rome: the situation of Norway and Sweden. In arguing against giving Britain and India separate votes, reference was made to the fact that Austria-Hungary also had two telegraph administrations, but that its delegations still exercised only one vote.<sup>35</sup> But no one commented on the fact that Sweden and Norway sent separate delegates to the conference, presented as such during the opening session (Mr. Nielsen for Norway, and Mr. Brändström for Sweden<sup>36</sup>), contributed to the organisation's budgets as separate members, and signed the convention as separate entities. This despite the fact that Norway did not possess its own foreign service, and that all its diplomatic relations were conducted by Sweden. Norway was not a fully sovereign state by the standards of the time, but it was still allowed separate representation in the ITU.

The next ITU conference convened in St Petersburg in 1875. On the table was a proposal for a new paragraph in the voting rule of the conference regulations which would allow for more than one vote per state if it represented more than one telegraph administration, and if the government had notified its intentions to hold multiple votes through diplomatic channels before the start of the conference. The proposal hardly elicited any discussion. Only the Belgian delegation suggested taking out the provision and returning firmly to the principle of one state, one vote. The Italian delegate even proposed expanding the exception to allow a double vote not only states representing more than one telegraph administration, but also those states which were particularly important in telegraph matters, for example as evidenced in a volume of international correspondence exceeding a certain limit. Neither the Belgian nor Italian proposal was adopted, and the

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 224-225.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 214-215.

result was to leave the decision up to the states (with multiple telegraph administrations) themselves in deciding how many votes their delegations to ITU conferences would have.<sup>37</sup>

The UPU chose an equally inclusive route, reflected in the fact that the organisation decided to call its members 'pays' (country) rather than 'etat' (state),<sup>38</sup> and to change its name from the General Postal Union to the Universal Postal Union at the 1878 congress.<sup>39</sup> The voting policy in the UPU, like in the ITU, started out as very simple: "Each country has one vote."<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, from the time of the Paris 1878 congress, the UPU adopted a nearly open door membership policy, again identical to that of the ITU: "Countries which have not taken part in the present Convention are admitted to be parties to it upon their demand."<sup>41</sup> A potential member simply had to inform the Swiss government through diplomatic channels that it wished to be considered a member, and the Swiss government would inform the rest of the membership. Accession automatically implied that the country accepted all duties of membership, and that it was given access to all membership benefits.<sup>42</sup>

A slightly different procedure applied to colonies. The original 1874 treaty contained a provision for admitting "countries beyond the sea" on condition that they came to agreement with the existing membership on the cost of sea conveyance and that no member raised objections.<sup>43</sup> Following this procedure, Britain applied for membership for its Indian colony in November 1875. A conference convened in Berne early in 1876 to examine the question, and decided to admit both British India and the French colonies as a whole to membership.<sup>44</sup> The procedure of calling a special conference proved to be cumbersome, and was changed at the 1878 congress. At that time a new article was inserted into the convention to list the colonies that would be considered full members of the Union. In 1878 the list included the above mentioned British India and the French colonies, but the congress also agreed to give such memberships to the Dominion of Canada, and the colonies of Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal.<sup>45</sup> From this time on, new colonial memberships could be added if the colonial power secured support from the rest of the congress to amend this article. Thus colonies did not apply for membership as if they were independent countries, yet once they had been admitted under this procedure they were still given all the benefits of membership, including the right to vote.

Several reasons were provided as justification for admitting colonies, either individually or collectively, to full membership of the union. A basic criterion was that they had to have independent postal administrations, but beyond this it was considered that these colonies covered such large territories and populations, and had their own attendant interests and

---

<sup>37</sup> *Documents de la Conférence Télégraphique Internationale de St-Petersbourg (1875)*, 280-282.

<sup>38</sup> Howland, "An alternative mode of international order," 169.

<sup>39</sup> Coddington, *Universal Postal Union*, 37-38.

<sup>40</sup> *UPU Berne Treaty (1874)*, art. 18.

<sup>41</sup> *UPU Paris Convention (1878)*, art. 18.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *UPU Berne Treaty (1874)*, art. 17.

<sup>44</sup> Coddington, *Universal Postal Union*, 35-36.

<sup>45</sup> *UPU Paris Convention (1878)*, art. 21.

problems, that it was desirable that they should be able to voice their opinions on international postal matters.<sup>46</sup> This was the argument used, for example, both by Britain in arguing for independent memberships (and votes) for Australia and South Africa in the 1880s and 1890s, and for the other members in accepting this demand. During the Vienna congress in 1891, when South Africa still stood outside the union and Britain asked for the congress' insurance that it would be granted a vote on adhering to the convention, the president assured the British delegate that there would be no difficulty in accommodating this request. In the interest of "completing and finalising" the union it was desirable that South Africa should join, and if it demanded a vote to do so the congress would have to acquiesce to its demand.<sup>47</sup>

Thus the UPU recognised that some of its members were colonies, not 'countries,' and had its own procedure for admitting them. This accounts for some of the difference in membership numbers outlined in figure 1 in the previous section. Yet countries such as Norway, Egypt, and Montenegro were given membership according to the normal procedure, and were not listed in the special colonial article, and were thus for the purposes of the UPU considered independent countries (if not sovereign states).

In 1891 the UPU had 58 members, according to its convention, whereas the Correlates of War dataset only recognises 27 of them:

Ordinary members ("1" in COW)	27 Austria (Austria-Hungary), Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Chile, Columbia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Persia (Iran), Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela
Countries mistakenly (?) excluded by COW ("0")	8 Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, El Salvador, Siam (Thailand), USA
Colonies (article 27 of UPU convention)	8 Australia, Canada, India, Danish colonies, Dutch colonies, French colonies, Portuguese colonies, Spanish colonies
Semi-sovereign members ("-1" or no entry in COW)	15 Bulgaria, Congo Free State, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Hawaii, Honduras, Hungary, Liberia, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Nicaragua, Norway, South African Republic (Transvaal), Tunisia

Fig. 4: Different categories of members in the UPU, 1891.<sup>48</sup>

As this table shows, colonies made up part of the additional membership of the UPU, but another interesting group are the semi-sovereign states. These were not subject to any special admission procedure. In the eyes of the UPU they were ordinary members capable

<sup>46</sup> Coddington, *Universal Postal Union*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> See extract from Vienna (1891) conference documents reprinted in British General Post Office to Swiss Postal Office, 24 Dec 1894, POST 33/4159, British Postal Museum and Archive, London, (hereafter BPMA).

<sup>48</sup> Source: *UPU Vienna Convention (1891)*, and Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke, "COW-2 IGO Data 2.0."



of adhering to the convention and fulfilling all duties of membership. The fifteen semi-sovereign entities in the table above are a mixed group. Geographically they belong to Europe, Latin America, Africa, and the Pacific. Some of them may have been excluded by the COW dataset because of their small population size. In the late 19th century Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Hawaii, Honduras, Luxembourg, Montenegro, and Nicaragua would all have fallen below the 500,000 population threshold applied by that dataset. Even if they had been larger the COW dataset might not have recognised them as sovereign. Some were in a situation similar to Bulgaria and Liberia, in the process of establishing themselves as sovereign states, and therefore excluded from the dataset until the transition is formally recognised by the appointment of diplomatic representatives from both Britain and France. Others had more in common with Egypt and Tunisia, two countries that had enjoyed a high degree of autonomy under formal Ottoman rule earlier in the 19th century, but by 1891 had become ‘protectorates’ of European states. Norway and Hungary, as mentioned before, both enjoyed significant domestic political autonomy as junior partners in European dual monarchies. The Congo Free State was an anomaly in the European colonisation of Africa as the only territory formally designated an independent state rather than a colony. The South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Kingdom of Hawaii would soon be incorporated under the rule of Britain and the United States respectively, but in late 1880s and early 1890s they both enjoyed formal independence and decided to participate in the UPU. The only thing these fifteen entities really had in common, besides their irregular or uncertain international status, was that they enjoyed domestic autonomy in many areas, including in postal- and telegraph matters. They were admitted to the UPU on this basis.

The presence of such semi-sovereign states in an IGO and at the international level in general seems like a contradiction in terms. Even the word ‘semi-sovereign’ fits poorly in a theory of international relations based on sovereign states. But in the 19th and early 20th century these states were a recognised group of actors in the international order. As Moore wrote in 1906: “there are states not in all respects independent that maintain international relations, to a greater or less extent, according to the degree of their dependence. Such states are generally called semi-sovereign.”<sup>49</sup> Sovereignty at this time was not an absolute, something a state either had or not. It was recognised that states could possess or more less sovereignty, or that they might enjoy different levels of sovereignty in different settings.

---

<sup>49</sup> John Bassett Moore, *A Digest of International Law*, vol. 1 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), 18. Citing Rivier, *Principes du Droit des Gens*, I. 52.

## IV Growing conflicts in the interwar period

The notion of inclusive IGO membership met limited opposition before the First World War, but the situation would change in the interwar period. With growing numbers of formally independent sovereign states taking part in international relations and the activities of IGOs, it became increasingly obvious that the great powers were using colonial membership as a way to boost their influence in these forums. Protests and conflicts followed.

The membership policy of the League of Nations set a precedent and defined the debate in other IGOs in the interwar period, including older IGOs such as the UPU and the ITU. The League of Nations was open for membership to “any fully self-governing State, Dominion or Colony ... if its admission is agreed by two-thirds of the Assembly” or if it was listed in the annex as an original member.<sup>50</sup> Despite the mention of colonies in this article, no colony ever became a member, and this provision seems to have been largely to acknowledge the special position of the British dominions. Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, and South Africa were original members of the League of Nations, and Ireland joined in 1923.

The recognition of the dominions’ international persona in their admission to the League of Nations led to changes in their status within the UPU. Before the war certain dominions had been listed in the UPU’s colonial article – India and Canada from 1878, Australia from 1891, South Africa from 1897,<sup>51</sup> and New Zealand from 1906<sup>52</sup> – a position confirmed by the first post-war UPU convention of 1920. However, in the 1924 convention there is no mention of the British dominions in the relevant convention article.<sup>53</sup> This did not mean that these entities had lost their membership, quite the contrary, because of their independent membership of the League of Nations, they had been upgraded to regular members of the UPU. Britain would later return to the argument that dominions had a separate right to independent membership in international organisations because of their status in the League of Nations when discussing whether or not to pursue separate representation for Newfoundland in the UPU. The Foreign Office and the Dominions Office argued that Newfoundland had a right to membership because of its status as a dominion, and wanted to pursue such membership through diplomatic channels as outlined in the UPU admissions procedure. The General Post Office argued against such action on the grounds that other UPU members would construe it as an “underhand” attempt by Britain to obtain an additional vote, and the resultant loss of prestige would seriously weaken Britain’s influence in the Union. Furthermore,

---

<sup>50</sup> Covenant of the League of Nations, art. 1.

<sup>51</sup> Allocated the vote for ‘other British colonies.’

<sup>52</sup> Allocated the vote for ‘other British colonies.’

<sup>53</sup> For an overview of colonies listed in UPU conventions from 1878 to 1939, see POST 33/4159, BPMA.

Newfoundland was less important in postal matters than many colonies, British or foreign, and a demand for separate membership on its behalf would undoubtedly prompt further demands from other colonial powers, or indeed from Britain's own colonies. The Postmaster General therefore "strongly deprecated" bringing forward a claim for Newfoundland, regardless of its dominion status.<sup>54</sup>

The British General Post Office argued against the Foreign Office (and Dominion Office) on the question of pursuing separate membership for Newfoundland in 1930, because it knew the situation within the UPU intimately, and was aware that any move on the part of Britain to secure additional votes would inevitably trigger more conflict. In the 1920s the system of colonial voting had reached new heights. In the ITU by 1925, Britain, France, Italy, and Portugal each held six additional votes.<sup>55</sup> A growing number of small and medium-sized states, led by the Latin American states, worked to abolish or limit colonial membership within both the ITU and the UPU.

During the 1932 ITU conference in Madrid the efforts to limit colonial voting registered a partial success in a compromise which reduced the number of colonial votes drastically. Although the conference was unable to reach agreement on a general rule to apply to all future conferences, after lengthy debates it did agree on a voting formula for use during the Madrid conference. The deal gave one additional vote to the colonial powers Belgium, Britain, Japan, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the US, and two additional votes to France. It recognised the independent votes of British India and the dominions Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Africa. Finally, the deal awarded an additional vote each to Germany and the USSR, which didn't have any colonies, but had managed to accumulate additional votes on the basis of their size and importance.<sup>56</sup> Although this meant that the colonial and other great powers still wielded additional votes, it was a step towards recognising the principle of one vote per sovereign state.

Inspired by the success in the ITU in 1932, the opponents of colonial voting submitted two proposals for limiting the membership of the UPU to the 1934 congress in Cairo. Argentina proposed that only sovereign states should be allowed to vote, "the criterion of sovereignty in cases of doubt being the maintenance of diplomatic representatives abroad." Colombia proposed that only "Dominions or Colonies possessing an autonomous Parliament" should be allowed to vote.<sup>57</sup> It is probable that both Argentina and Columbia had in mind a definition of sovereignty like the one implied in the contemporary Montevideo Convention. Article 1 of this convention defined a state as an entity possessing "(a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to

---

<sup>54</sup> Williamson (GPO) to Dominions Office, copy sent to Foreign Office, 4 April 1930, POST 33/4159, BPMA.

<sup>55</sup> Codding and Rutkowski, *The International Telecommunication Union in a Changing World*, 11.

<sup>56</sup> Documents de la Conférence Télégraphique Internationale de Madrid (1932), vol. 2 (Berne, 1933), XLII-XLIII.

<sup>57</sup> Williamson (GPO) to FO, 10 April 1933, POST 33/4159, BPMA.

enter into relations with other states.”<sup>58</sup> The two proposals submitted to the UPU emphasised different aspects of sovereignty. The Argentine proposal put a premium on the external (Westphalian or international legal) dimension of sovereignty in focusing on diplomatic representation, while the Colombian proposal emphasised the domestic aspects of sovereignty in a state’s autonomous government of its own territory signified by possessing an autonomous parliament.<sup>59</sup> The main concern of the Latin American states and their supporters were to defend the principle of sovereign equality of all independent states – as small states themselves this would give them more influence – against the principles of great power dominance and weighted voting for more important states.

Interestingly, Britain decided to join the group working for abolishing colonial votes in the UPU. Although this might look like an altruistic act on the part of the greatest colonial empire of the time, it was actually more a question of rivalry with France and other colonial powers, and an attempt to curry favour with the smaller states. It also displays a certain arrogance and naiveté on the part of the British Foreign Office towards the position of the British Empire in the world and how the Empire was viewed by others. First of all, to the British mind, there was a clear difference between colonies and dominions, which was less clear to observers from other states. Britain considered the British dominions, plus India, as truly separate administrations, and they should therefore not be counted as ‘British’ when comparing, say, ‘British’ and ‘French’ votes in the UPU: “it is not right to count them as they are completely independent.”<sup>60</sup> The British Foreign Office failed to see that other members of the UPU considered the dominions as ‘British’ votes. Indeed, the Latin American states Britain tried to join in fighting against colonial membership, sought to limit both colonial and dominion votes, as the General Post Office pointed out.<sup>61</sup> Britain’s greatest rival in colonial matters, France, also considered the dominions’ votes as firmly in the British camp, as evidenced by its counter-demand for further French votes whenever Britain sought new votes for a dominion or colony.<sup>62</sup> There is also evidence of extensive cooperation between the British delegation and the various dominion delegations before and during UPU conferences.<sup>63</sup> Secondly, because of this peculiar British way of counting British votes in the UPU, when discounting the dominions after 1924, Britain – the largest colonial empire – no longer had any (!) colonial votes, whereas France had several, and even the US, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, and Japan had colonial votes for colonies much less important than Britain’s. This state of affairs was “absurd,” “obviously

---

<sup>58</sup> (Montevideo) Convention on Rights and Duties of States, 26 December 1933, article 1.

<sup>59</sup> See definitions of different kinds of sovereignty in Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3–4.

<sup>60</sup> Smith (FO) to Phillips (GPO), 6 March 1933, POST 33/4159, BPMA.

<sup>61</sup> Handwritten note in the margin by unknown GPO official, on Foreign Office memorandum, 9 Oct 1930, attached to letter of 24 Oct 1930, POST 33/4159, BPMA.

<sup>62</sup> See for example what happened at the 1932 ITU conference in Madrid. Report by the British delegates to the International Telegraph and Radiotelegraph Conferences of Madrid, 1932, [no date], POST 33/4159, BPMA.

<sup>63</sup> See Howland, “An alternative mode of international order,” 170, n. 24.

unfair,” and “ridiculous,” according to the Foreign Office, who advocated amending it one of two ways: either to abolish colonial votes altogether, or claim additional votes for Britain.<sup>64</sup> After both policies had failed at the 1934 UPU conference, Sir F. Williamson, of the British delegation, in reserving Britain’s right to revisit the question at future conferences, summarised the position for Britain thus: “under present conditions 14 Colonial votes are given to 8 countries for about 55 Colonies, etc., whereas Great Britain, which has 52 Colonies, has no Colonial vote. It has, therefore, the unassailable right to demand to be treated on an equal footing.”<sup>65</sup> Lastly, the British Foreign Office obviously felt that its dominions and colonies had more right to a separate vote than the colonies of others, France above all. The French votes were considered “mere pocket votes” whereas both for the British dominions and any future colony that might be admitted, “owing to their internal independence, this would never be the case.”<sup>66</sup>

As this shows, both for Britain, other colonial powers, and states without colonial possessions, the question of colonial memberships and colonial votes in the interwar period had become mainly a question of great power politics. As long as the system was there, the colonial powers would seek to secure as many votes for themselves as possible. Large states without colonial possessions, like Germany and the USSR, saw the system as unfair, and claimed (and received) additional votes based merely on their size and importance. Small states without colonial possessions, like Argentina and Colombia, argued for the abolition of all colonial (and dominion) votes, in accordance with the principle of equality of sovereign states.

## V The end of inclusive membership

The practice of admitting colonies or semi-sovereign states came to an end after the Second World War, but there is no clear cut-off date. Organisations did not (at first) expel former members, and the issue only came to an end when former colonies gained independence and applied for membership as sovereign states. At the same time certain anomalies continued, even within the United Nations. Belarus SSR and Ukraine SSR were founding members of the UN even though everyone recognised that they were not sovereign states. They were admitted to membership as the result of a compromise between the Soviet Union and the Western great powers. The Soviet Union was afraid of being outnumbered in the new UN organisation and pushed for individual membership for all its 16 constituent republics. The compromise deal gave it three seats: Belarus and Ukraine in

---

<sup>64</sup> FO to GPO, 24 Oct 1930, with attached memo of 9 Oct 1930, POST 33/4159, BPMA.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in “Summary of events on Colonial Votes question between London and Cairo Postal Union Congresses,” [no date], POST 33/4159, BPMA.

<sup>66</sup> Foreign Office memorandum, 9 Oct 1930, attached to letter of 24 Oct 1930, POST 33/4159, BPMA.

addition to the main USSR seat.<sup>67</sup> The admission of Belarus and the Ukraine thus continued the earlier practice by great powers to seek to have their colonies admitted to boost their voting power and influence. This also shows that even as late as 1945, in the supposed highpoint for an international system based on sovereign states, there was some flexibility on the question of admitting actors to membership in international relations.

The ITU held its first post-war plenipotentiary conference in Atlantic City in July 1947. This was an important conference in the organisation's history. The conference adopted an entirely new structure for the organisation which brought the ITU more in line with other IGOs. It established a truly international secretariat in the place of the earlier bureau under Swiss supervision, and established a new Administrative Council which would meet every year and act on behalf of the plenipotentiary conference in the intervals between its meetings. The 1947 conference furthermore decided that the ITU should become a specialised agency of the United Nations, and it adopted a new policy for membership of the ITU.

Many of the debates from the interwar period re-emerged in Atlantic City. Latin American states, supported by the United States and the United Kingdom, argued for a limitation on membership and voting rights to sovereign states. In his opening statement Mr. Garrison Norton of the US delegation argued that the objective of the discussion was "to place the membership on a sound foundation of recognized sovereign states, capable of assuming complete responsibility, not only for themselves but for all their territories." This would bring membership of the ITU "more nearly in conformity with the procedures and policies of the United Nations and of other international administrative organizations affiliated with the United Nations."<sup>68</sup> The United States and the United Kingdom proposed introducing a new category of associate membership to allow colonial territories with autonomous telecommunications administrations to participate in the work of the union, but insisted that such associate members should not enjoy the right to vote. Existing colonial members of the ITU, supported by France and other colonial powers, argued against removing the full membership rights of colonies. The representative of the Dutch East Indies was open to changes, "if justice can be done to the rights of the present members of the Union," and questioned the logic of trying to promote international cooperation "by excluding from full membership several totally independent telecommunication administrations, which cover vast areas of the world." The delegation of Belgian Congo reminded the conference that the ITU "constitute a technical and administrative union." The Moroccan delegation likewise asked for an explanation for why "questions of sovereignty and political autonomy are suddenly linked to the question of the organization of the ITU."<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Ruth B. Russell, *A History of the United Nations Charter: The Role of the United States 1940-1945* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1958).

<sup>68</sup> Documents of the International Telecommunications Conference at Atlantic City (1947), doc. no. 57 TR-E.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., doc. no. 137 TR-E.

In the end the 1947 conference reached a compromise to establish a new membership policy of full and associate members for new admissions, while allowing all existing members of the ITU to continue as full members. The new convention recognised three ways for a country to become a member of the ITU: i) “any country or group of territories” listed in an annex to the convention; ii) any UN member that acceded to the ITU convention; iii) “any sovereign country” not listed in the annex or a member of the UN if admitted by a two-thirds majority. Associate membership was open to UN trust territories, territories or groups of territories “not fully responsible for the conduct of its international relations,” or any country wishing to become an associate member if accepted by a simple majority of the ITU membership. Associate members would have the same rights and obligations as full members, except the right to vote or eligibility for election to the Administrative Council or other ITU organs.<sup>70</sup> The annex listed most of the members of the ITU during the interwar period, including the colonies of Belgian Congo, the Dutch East Indies, Burma, Portuguese colonies, French colonies, British colonies, US territories, and the French protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia (jointly),<sup>71</sup> and these colonies continued to participate at ITU conferences in the 1950s and -60s.

Colonial membership gradually lost importance in the ITU as former colonies gained independence, joined the UN, and acceded to the ITU convention as full members. The category of ‘associate member’ established in 1947 was rarely used. Finally, at the 1973 conference in Malaga-Torremolinos, the ITU abolished all vestiges of colonial membership. This decision was intricately linked to the process of decolonisation and the changes taking place within the UN and other IOs as a consequence of the new majority of third world countries. Argentina, a familiar name from these discussions in the interwar period, and Zaire, formerly the Belgian Congo, led the charge against colonialism and imperialism in the ITU. They were being supported by nearly all newly independent states, Latin America, and the Soviet bloc. The United Kingdom, France, and the United States were the most active on the opposing side.

The end of colonial membership in the ITU consisted of five related decisions: 1) the abolishment of the category of ‘associate member’; 2) the removal of the words ‘territories’ or ‘groups of territories’ from all parts of the convention; 3) the consequent deletion of British, French, US, Spanish, and Portuguese territories from the list of members in annex 1 of the convention, and therefore their expulsion from membership; 4) the decision to exclude South Africa and Portugal from participation in the activities of the ITU in protest against their colonial policies; and, 5) the expulsion of Rhodesia.

The majority of debate revolved around the use of the words ‘territories’ or ‘groups of territories’ in the convention. The Montreux Convention of 1965, identical to the 1947 Atlantic City convention on this point, stated that a member of the ITU was “any country or group of territories listed in Annex 1 upon signature and ratification of, or accession to,

---

<sup>70</sup> International Telecommunication Convention, Atlantic City, 1947, art. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., annex 1.

this Convention by it or on its behalf.”<sup>72</sup> The inclusion of this annex was part of the compromise agreed in 1947 to allow all existing members of the ITU to continue as full members, regardless of their international status and whether or not they were members of the UN. Subsequent ITU plenipotentiary conferences updated the annex to list all current members. The 1965 convention still recognised French, Spanish, Portuguese, British, and US overseas territories, as well as Rhodesia, as full members, and listed the Territory of South West Africa as represented by South Africa.<sup>73</sup> Newly independent states saw the presence of these ‘territories’ as equal members in the ITU as an “insult.” The term ‘territory’ itself was “repugnant” and since it was “synonymous with a colony or a military base [it] must be dropped so as to give moral support to peoples fighting for their independence.”<sup>74</sup> In one of several long speeches on the subject, the delegate of Zaire explained these views more fully: He argued that the ITU was “deviating from the normal behaviour of international organizations today” in allowing “political entities which do not have the status of ‘States’” to have “the same rights and obligations, i.e. the quality of Member of the Union, as independent States.”

What we do refuse is to pass over the concept of the legal equality of States within an international organization or to reduce our countries, our States, to the level of territories or groups of territories whose political position is not sufficiently recognized by the countries responsible for them for us to accept dealing on an equal footing with political entities which are politically underdeveloped.<sup>75</sup>

The United States, the United Kingdom, and France warned against deleting the terms ‘territories’ or ‘groups of territories’ because this would lead to the expulsion of five of the organisation’s members. They argued against taking a hasty decision which would “deprive a Member of its rights.”<sup>76</sup> In an attempt to preserve these entities’ memberships the three Western great powers tried to rename them to ‘administrations.’ The observer from the United Nations who was present at the conference also warned against deleting articles dealing with UN trust territories because the existence of such territories was a fact, and “any change in the trust system would require a revision of Chapter 12 of the United Nations Charter; which could not be done by the Plenipotentiary Conference.”<sup>77</sup> Even developing countries like Jamaica and Venezuela warned against expelling all ‘territories’ outright because this would exclude a number of small island states who were unable to bear the full costs of independence, and Malawi urged the conference to “take care not to overlook valid reasons for retaining the reference to territories by being over-zealous in its

---

<sup>72</sup> International Telecommunication Convention, Montreux, 1965, art. 1(2a).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., annex 1.

<sup>74</sup> ITU, Documents of the Plenipotentiary Conference (Malaga-Torremolinos 1973), doc. no. 139-E.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., doc. no. 442-E.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



opposition to colonialism.”<sup>78</sup> But the coalition of states against colonialism and imperialism would not be swayed by such arguments, and decided to delete all reference to the terms ‘territories’ in the convention, to remove the French, British, Spanish, Portuguese, and US territories, as well as Rhodesia, from the list of members, and to delete the category of ‘associate member.’<sup>79</sup> With this all vestiges of colonial membership was removed from the ITU convention.

It is interesting to note that it was the newly independent states of Africa and Asia, alongside the older former colonial states of Latin America, which led the charge against an inclusive membership policy. The newly independent states, clinging to the notion of sovereignty, sought to expel anyone not sovereign. Sovereignty and sovereign equality was their only claim to actorhood on the international stage and membership of the international order. Having to prove to themselves and others that they belong, the newest members of a club often become the most conservative and traditionalist. The final victory of the sovereignty principle (for the time being at least) thus came at the hands of the former outsiders, while the older core members of the order argued for a more flexible and pragmatic approach to membership.

## VI Conclusion

Why did IGOs like the ITU and UPU decide to adopt inclusive membership policies in the 19th century? Why did they allow semi-sovereign states like Egypt and Norway to operate as full members, and what did they gain by granting equal membership rights to colonies? It would appear that the international status of an entity was not the most important consideration for these organisations in deciding whether that entity should be allowed to join or not. Their main priority was to extend their regimes to all parts of the world and to facilitate the further development of postal- and telegraph services. Telegraph lines did cross into non-sovereign territory, and citizens of colonies and metropolitan countries alike sent and received letters. Therefore the main criterion for membership was whether or not an entity possessed autonomy in postal- and telegraph matters. If its communications services were fully in the control of another state, it would be enough to allow that state to become a member, but where that was not the case, it was desirable to allow also the non-sovereign entity to become a member so that it could advocate its interests and implement the organisation’s policies. In this these IGOs defined their objects of governance not in terms of sovereign states, but in functional terms according to what was necessary for the implementation of a world-wide system of postal- and telegraph service.

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., doc. no. 125-E; 139-E.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., doc. no. 443-E.

Simultaneously to this flexible, pragmatic, and functional approach to membership, the ITU, the UPU, and other early IGOs continued to apply the norms and practices of international conference diplomacy as if all its members were sovereign states. Early conferences would traditionally be called by a monarch, the opening session included the familiar welcoming speech by the host followed by a speech by the doyen of the diplomatic corps, and all delegates were designated as 'plenipotentiaries' and treated like diplomatic representatives regardless of their domestic administrative affiliation. That is, these IGOs employed the language and practice of inter-state diplomacy in a technical and non-political setting. They also emphasised the sovereign equality and independence of all members. Their conventions did not regulate the domestic provision of telegraph- and postal services, it merely offered guidelines and recommendations for coordinating the international traffic of telegrams and letters, and these only took force upon the ratification of the member states. This paradox of combining sovereignty principles with functional decisions based on technical and practical considerations was not fully resolved until the organisations took the final leap to a membership policy based firmly of sovereign states in the 1970s.

These IGOs formed part of the international order in the late 19th century. They emerged in parallel to the consolidation of modern nation-states and the development of new technologies and industrial growth. Buzan and Lawson described them as an important new social interaction capacity which facilitated communication and other forms of interaction in the international order.<sup>80</sup> As such they provided an opportunity for aspiring members of the international order to gain recognition of their actorhood. Japan took advantage of this opportunity and used membership of IGOs as a way to force the Western states to treat Japan as an equal. It joined the UPU in 1877 as a way to reclaim autonomy and control over its postal services in the midst of a conflict with Britain over British post offices in Japan. Since all members of the UPU were treated as sovereign equals, joining the UPU was a way for Japan to become an equal to Britain and the other Western states.<sup>81</sup> Japan was not the only state in this position, and it is possible that similar considerations influenced the decisions of Turkey, Egypt, Persia, Siam, and states in Latin America when they decided to join these new global IGOs. In this way states aspiring to full membership of the international order was able to exploit the language of sovereignty used by IGOs as a way to claim an equal status with the core members of the system.

Such considerations also explain the hostility of first Latin American states and later the newly independent states of Africa and Asia towards including colonies as full members of these IGOs. The presence of non-sovereign members is threatening to states with only a tenuous claim to sovereignty. If non-sovereign entities are included as full members, it becomes impossible to claim that all members are sovereign. Membership of the IGO will

---

<sup>80</sup> Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 2015), 84-89.

<sup>81</sup> Douglas Howland, "Japan and the Universal Postal Union: An Alternative Internationalism in the 19th Century," *Social Science Japan Journal* 17, no. 1 (2014).

no longer confer sovereignty and actorhood to the members. The conflict over membership lead to a politicisation of these organisations which had formerly been organs purely for technical and functional cooperation. This is what happened to the ITU and the UPU in the interwar and postwar periods. Newly independent states or states which had only recently been included in the organisation, sought to exclude from membership anyone non-sovereign. A claim to legal sovereignty was their only basis for claiming international actorhood, and anything that threatened the importance of the sovereignty criterion was therefore a threat to their actorhood. There is therefore an inherent conflict between the two groups of 'included' entities: semi-sovereign (tenuously sovereign?) states and colonies.

How representative are these results? The UPU and the ITU were unusual in having an organised system of colonial membership, and in granting colonies separate representation and the right to vote. Such colonial memberships also existed in the International Union for the Publication of Customs Tariffs (1890), and there were some individual colonial parties to sanitary conventions, but otherwise colonies were either excluded or covered by the membership of the colonial power. The other trend identified in the paper, semi-sovereign or 'anomalous' states as members, is representative. Looking at membership of IGOs for the year 1904<sup>82</sup> reveals that Luxembourg and Montenegro were full members of the European state system and routinely included in IGOs. Both were signatories to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (1899), for example, and participated in the Hague Conventions and various IGOs for transportation and health issues. The fact that the European dual monarchies – Austria-Hungary and Sweden-Norway – had separate memberships in the UPU and the ITU is also representative for the overall situation. Norway held a higher number of separate memberships than Hungary, but both were given separate representation in IGOs in this period. Congo represents an interesting case of what we today would classify as a colony, but in the late 19th century it was classified as a 'free state,' and as such held separate membership in IGOs. Other semi-sovereign states with independent membership in more than one IGO were Egypt and Tunisia, which although they were under 'protection' of respectively Britain and France, were considered at the time to be separate entities with an independent right of membership and representation in international relations.

Sovereign states form the core of the international system. This relationship defines both the system and its actors. It also forms the core of the discipline of International Relations, defining the subject matter of the discipline. Sovereignty is a central concept in this story, and many books have been written trying to define it. Krasner lists four types of sovereignty in the introduction to his study on the subject: (a) international legal sovereignty, which refers to practices of mutual recognition between entities with formal juridical independence; (b) Westphalian sovereignty, which refers to the exclusion of external actors from a given territory; (c) domestic sovereignty, which refers to "the formal

---

<sup>82</sup> Based on information on membership of IGOs in *Annuaire de la Vie Internationale* (1905), (Monaco: Institut International de la Paix, 1905).

organization of political authority within the state and the ability of public authorities to exercise effective control within the borders of their own polity”; and (d) interdependence sovereignty, which refers to “the ability of public authorities to regulate the flow of information, ideas, goods, people, pollutants, or capital across the borders of their state.”<sup>83</sup> Although sovereignty can be seen as a status, something an entity either possesses or not, this paper suggests that it is more accurate to view it as a list of criteria, and as something an entity can possess more or less of. Which criteria are seen as necessary and important may vary over time and place.<sup>84</sup> It is also possible that the criteria for sovereignty and the right to be included vary between different fields of activity. The UPU and ITU focused on technical cooperation of postal- and telegraph matters, and explicitly declined to discuss what they considered to be ‘political’ questions. From the perspective of these two IGOs, therefore, the most important consideration was to include all providers of postal- and telegraph services, so that unified policies could be applied to all international communication. Domestic sovereignty as expressed in efficient government administration thus became the primary criteria for membership. At the same time, admissions procedures in both the ITU and the UPU centred on communications through diplomatic channels. Standard diplomatic procedures were also followed at the organisations’ conferences. This means that the semi-sovereign states admitted to membership were treated as if they were fully sovereign. Does this mean that they were also full members of the international system? At a minimum it shows that the question of membership in the international order is more complicated than simply being a matter of state sovereignty.

---

<sup>83</sup> Krasner, *Sovereignty*, 3-4.

<sup>84</sup> See Thomas J. Biersteker, "State, Sovereignty and Territory," in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (London: Sage, 2002), 163.

## References

- Annuaire de la Vie Internationale (1905)*. Monaco: Institut International de la Paix, 1905.
- Biersteker, Thomas J. "State, Sovereignty and Territory." In *Handbook of International Relations*, edited by Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons, 157- 76. London: Sage, 2002.
- Brown, Chris, and Kirsten Ainley. *Understanding International Relations*. 4th ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Burbank, Jane, and Frederick Cooper. *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Buzan, Barry, and George Lawson. *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Charter of the United Nations*, 26 June 1945.
- Codding, George A. *The Universal Postal Union: Coordinator of the International Mails*. New York: New York University Press, 1964.
- Codding, George A., and Anthony M. Rutkowski. *The International Telecommunication Union in a Changing World*. Dedham, MA: Artech House, 1982.
- Covenant of the League of Nations*, 28 April 1919.
- Howland, Douglas. "Japan and the Universal Postal Union: An Alternative Internationalism in the 19th Century." *Social Science Japan Journal* 17, no. 1 (2014): 23-39.
- Howland, Douglas. "An alternative mode of international order: The international administrative union in the nineteenth century." *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 161-83.
- Hurd, Ian. "Choices and Methods in the Study of International Organizations." *Journal of International Organizations Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 8-22.
- International Telecommunications (Telegraph) Union, Conference documents and conventions from Paris (1865), Vienna (1868), Rome (1871-72), St Petersburg (1875), London (1879), Berlin (1885), Paris (1890), Budapest (1896), London (1903), Lisbon (1908), Paris (1925), Brussels (1928), Madrid (1932), Cairo (1938), Atlantic City (1947), Paris (1949), Buenos Aires (1952), Geneva (1959), Montreux (1965), and Malaga-Torremolinos (1973). Available online: <http://handle.itu.int/11.1004/020.1000/4>
- Jackson, Robert. *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Klabbers, Jan. *An Introduction to International Organizations Law*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Krasner, Stephen D. *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Lyons, F. S. L. *Internationalism in Europe, 1815-1914*. Leyden: A. W. Sythoff, 1963.

- (Montevideo) *Convention on Rights and Duties of States*, 26 December 1933.
- Moore, John Bassett. *A Digest of International Law*. Vol. 1, Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1906.
- Murphy, Craig N. *International Organization and Industrial Change: Global Governance since 1850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- POST 33/4159, "British colonies and dependencies. Status and representation at conventions, conferences, of Universal Postal Union," British Postal Museum and Archive, London.
- Osiander, Andreas. *The States System of Europe, 1640-1990: Peacemaking and the Conditions of International Stability*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Osterhammel, Jürgen. *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Patrick Camiller. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Pevhouse, Jon, and Timothy Nordstrom. "Codebook for Correlates of War 2: International Governmental Organizations Data Set Version 2.1." 9 December 2003.
- Pevhouse, Jon, Timothy Nordstrom, and Kevin Warnke. "The Correlates of War 2 International Governmental Organizations Data Version 2.0." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 21, no. 2 (2004): 101-19.
- Reinsch, Paul S. *Public International Unions: Their Work and Organization*. Boston and London: Ginn & Company, 1911.
- Russell, Ruth B. *A History of the United Nations Charter: The Role of the United States 1940-1945*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1958.
- Sands, Philippe, and Pierre Klein. *Bowett's Law of International Institutions*. 5th ed. London: Sweet & Maxwell, 2001.
- Union of International Associations, *The Yearbook of International Organizations*, <http://www.uia.org/yearbook>
- Universal Postal Union, Conventions of Berne (1874), Paris (1878), Lisbon (1885), Vienna (1891), Washington (1897), and Rome (1906). Available in POST 46/57, British Postal Museum and Archive, London.
- Wallace, Michael, and J. David Singer. "Intergovernmental Organization in the Global System, 1815-1964: A Quantitative Description." *International Organization* 24, no. 2 (1970): 239-87.