

# In the engine room of intellectual cooperation. A prosographic approach to the civil servants of the *Institut international de coopération intellectuelle* in Paris

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In 1926 the Weimar Republic finally joined the League of Nations; after some quarrels before the official invitation – and the acceptance by the German officials – Germany took its seat in the general assembly and the council of the Genovese institution. But the year 1926 did not only mark the time when Germany was allowed to take part in the political works of the League of Nations; from now on (and even a little bit earlier to pave the way for full participation of the new member) German citizens could also become member of the regular staff of the League of Nations' secretariat – and of the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation in Paris, too.

The first one chosen for a post in Paris was the well-known social scientist Gerhard von Schulze Gaevernitz, a senior professor with close relationships especially to England. He started his work in Paris late in spring 1925, wrote in his diary that he started getting in contact with French officials – and that he left the Institute one and a half year later:

„Am Institut überwiegend Menschen empfangen, internationale Beziehungen vermittelt, insb. Zwischen Deutschland und Frankreich – konnte manchen Menschen nützlich werden – aber gab die Stellung im Spätherbst auf, welche meine wissenschaftliche u. erzieherische Lebensaufgabe kreuzte.“<sup>15</sup>

After Schulze Gaevernitz had left the institute for good its director Julien Luchaire together with the German foreign ministry began to look for an substitute.

„Herr Luchaire bat um meine Vermittlung bei der Beschaffung eines deutschen Nachfolgers für Schulze-Gaevernitzs. Es würde entweder ein in wissenschaftlichen Kreisen bewandertes Verwaltungsbeamter oder, was im deutschen Interesse vorzuziehen wäre, ein jüngerer Wissenschaftler mit Verwaltungsgeschick in Frage kommen. Die äußeren Bedingungen sind ungünstig (50 000franz. Franken Jahresgehalt). Es wird nötig sein, deutscherseits etwas zu diesem Einkommen beizutragen, wenn wir eine tüchtige Kraft stellen wollen.“<sup>16</sup>

In the end the German side sent Werner Picht to Paris, an expert for adult education with close connections to the Prussian minister of education and a member of the vast George circle which had quite an impact in Germany in the interwar years. Shortly after Picht another German – Margarethe Rothbarth – was sent to

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<sup>15</sup> „At the institute mainly received people, conveyed international relations, especially between Germany and France – could become important for some people – but gave up the post late in fall, because of my scientific and pedagogical life goal.“ Gerhard von Schulze Gaevernitz. *Lebenschronik 1925/26*. Nachlass Schulze-Gaevernitz: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit. Archiv des Liberalismus

<sup>16</sup> „Mister Luchaire asked for my advice to choose a German successor for Schulze-Gaevernitz. Either an official with close ties to the scientific community or, and that would be preferred in the German interest, a younger scientist with administrative abilities could be useful. The conditions are rather unattractive (50 000 Franc per year). The German side must add something to this amount of money to be able to find a capable person.“ Brief Soehring an Staatssekretär a.D. von Rheinbaben, Ministerialdirektor Schäffer u. Legationsrat von Bülow 17. September 1926. In: Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes R 65508 *Das Internationale Institut für geistige Zusammenarbeit in Paris*.

Paris as well; she was an historian by training and part of the other influential intellectual circle of the time (the Naumann-Kreis).

The switch from a well-known researcher at the end of his career (Schulze Gaevernitz) to young academically trained experts (Picht) is just one example to highlight the recruiting policy of the Institute. But it gives a hint towards the competences and qualities that a member of the institute should own. In my paper I focus on the civil servants who worked at the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation in Paris: Who applied for a post at this institute? What was his or her career path before he or she tried to become a member of the Institute? Which role did the national states play to find suitable candidates for the vacant position – and what did ‘suitable’ mean in certain cases (and suitable for whom; for the League of Nations, for the government?) Who got rejected (and if one can answer this question – with which reasons)? Who got hired? Where did people go after their contracts ended?

For answering these questions, I want to use mainly the personnel records of the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation. My aim is therefore not to concentrate (again) on the big names of intellectual cooperation in the 1920s and 1930s – like Einstein, Curie, Valéry, Thomas Mann, Bergson etc. – but to shed light on the prosography of those people who did all the administrative work and earned their living through the daily routine of intellectual cooperation and became part of a – surely – French dominated but nevertheless international working environment. A closer look in – as I would like to call it – the “engine room” of intellectual cooperation will lead to a better understanding of what intellectual cooperation meant in that months and weeks when no congress took place, no committee meeting was scheduled, and no lecture series had to be organized.

Transnational actors are therefore used as “Trojan horses” to get a better insight into transnational processes of intellectual cooperation. By looking at the officials at the Institute and by taking serious their acting on “different social arenas and networks” and their “multiple roles [...] on different spatial scales”<sup>17</sup> we will get a fine-tuned understanding of how an institution like the Institute worked, where its problems lay and in which areas it worked rather successfully.

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<sup>17</sup> Antje Dietze u. Katja Naumann, Revisiting Transnational Actors from a Spatial Perspective, in: *The International History Review* 25 (2018), H. 3/4, p. 415-430.