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European Administrative Governance series

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The Politics of Information

The Case of the European Union

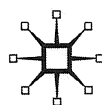
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(2014)



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First published 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN: 978–1–137–32540–2

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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3

Information Processes and International Organizations (1910–1940)

Michael Geary and Nico Randeraad

Introduction

In 1934, a young American political scientist, Francis Graham Wilson, after having spent a year as fellow of the Social Science Research Council in Geneva, published his first book, which dealt with labour questions and international cooperation in the post-World War I period. In it, he analysed the workings of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its first 15 years of operation. Referring to the organization of international research, he remarked

There must be more lost in international research than in national governmental or institutional research, and this is true whether individual or co-operative international research is considered. The material is more heterogeneous, the research workers are diverse in traditions and points of view, their traditions as to method are divergent, all the written languages of the world must be employed, and there are innumerable delays and difficulties in securing the proper material.... [B]efore international comparison can be developed, a mass of political obstruction must be cleared away by the gradual processes of international good will and the reform of national statistical method. (Wilson 1934, 323–324)

Wilson points to a few essential problems of international cooperation in collecting information, which have not lost significance today: the diversity of the raw material, the various methods of gathering data, languages used, administrative systems used, and, last but not least, political interests. He furthermore clearly recognized the 'problem' of information for an international organization such as the ILO in the

1920s and 1930s. He was not the only one. With the growing number of international organizations in the early 20th century, and the increasing need for and use of expert knowledge, the collection and management of information developed into a separate scientific field. As early as 1895, Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine had founded the International Institute of Bibliography, which set up a steadily expanding Universal Bibliographic Repertory and organized an international search service. Science, however, did not drift very far away from its object; as we shall see, the scientific actors of information-science mingled freely with the politicians and officials who were active in the arena of international politics.

This chapter argues that international organizations in the interwar years encountered challenges that were to a great extent similar to those facing the European Union today. It seeks to analyse the role that information played in interwar international organizations by focusing on their organizational design and political mission, as reflected in the specific information-processing frameworks that emerged shortly before and after the First World War. We focus on three uses of information in international organizations: (1) developing and maintaining a knowledge base; (2) framing international legislation; and (3) offering conflict resolution and mediation. These forms of information utilization, derived from the literature on organizational knowledge (see Feldman and March 1988 [1981]; Choo 1998), are analysed through three different international organizations as examples of each of the types, although the types can also overlap in one organization. This chapter explores these information processes mainly within the following organizations: Union Internationale des Villes (later also known as the International Union of Local Authorities (or IULA)); the International Labour Organization (ILO); and the League of Nations (in particular, the Minority Protection System). From their foundations, these organizations have had global aspirations, but in the interwar years their European basis (and bias) was preponderant. Although there is an increasing number of studies dealing with international organizations in the interwar years that will be cited in part throughout this study, our emphasis on information use is relatively novel.

Each of the three organizations relied heavily on information, but gathered, processed, and analysed it for different purposes and outcomes. Their organizational design and political mission were reflected in specific information-processing systems. In particular, we differentiate between constitutive and operational stages with regard to information processing in the development of the organizations, that is, how decision-making

and information processing were organized, and how this worked out in the interwar years. The knowledge base type of organization, such as IULA, acted as an agent for the collection and dissemination of information among its members rather than as a bureaucratic machine setting regulations or drafting legislation. Although most international organizations are involved in acquiring knowledge through information, for instance the European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), some organizations did not seek to turn that knowledge into political influence. The information process geared to the development and maintenance of a knowledge base reflected a desire to collect information in an early form of database management for collective purposes. Framing international legislation, the second type of information processing system examined here, was and remains a key activity for many international organizations. Taking the ILO as a case study, the chapter analyses how knowledge-based policies and information processing played a key role in shaping international norms and standards and a legislative framework for labour conditions. The third type of information process examined in this chapter explores the relationship of information, conflict resolution, and mediation through an analysis of the League of Nation's Minority Protection System (MPS). The period of the early interwar years witnessed the increase in power and influence of international civil servants in the secretariats of quite a few new international organizations. It also reflected the changing role of administrators within political institutions at this historical moment, an element of the changing constellation of modern power theorized by Max Weber (Cowan 2007, 35; Girth and Wright Mills 1946). Indeed, within the League of Nation's administrative apparatus, civil servants demonstrated well Michel Foucault's concept of power/knowledge, where power depended on knowledge reflected in officials' growing expertise, yet the gathering and formulation of that knowledge was reliant on and produced through specific structures of power closely linked to territorial or ethnic interests (Cowan 2007, 35; Foucault 1991).

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to sufficiently and adequately examine the inner workings of each organization regarding its administrative procedures and tools for gathering, processing, and analysing information, it does provide a suitable basis for exploring the importance of information in the period after World War I in the international arena. First, the sections focus on how information was gathered and with what consequences. Second, we zoom in on organizational features and historical moments that highlight the politicization or political character of information processing.

International Organizations as 'knowledge base': Union Internationale des Villes

In July 1913, the first International Congress of Cities was held in Gand. Typically, in the beginning of the 20th century, when the European nation state was in many ways still in its infancy, initiatives from below (in this case local authorities) had a greater chance of succeeding than state-led initiatives. The aim of the organizers was to establish a permanent international bureau for local government, which would study problems related to the newly founded European city in all its aspects: housing, the urban economy, public administration, population, and so on. Institutionalizing this proved to be difficult, but the project remained very much alive through congresses and personal exchanges throughout the interwar period, and continued after the Second World War. The nine international congresses of the Union Internationale des Villes (IULA in English) that were held between 1924 (the first after the war) and 1938 provided the lifeblood of a transnational community of urban reformers. In organizational terms, the Union functioned as an information-network rather than as a bureaucratic institution, although from 1926 it had a small permanent bureau in Brussels. The mission of the congresses, as Floris Wibaut – one of its devoted leaders – remarked, was to *study* problems related to local government, not to take binding majority decisions (*Administrer la ville en Europe* 2003, 116). It was evident that the urban reformers were careful to avoid political struggle, which would paralyse the congresses. In 1934, Belgian Emile Vinck, another protagonist of the international municipal movement, defined the objectives of the Union as the study of 'the biology of the communal environment' which would potentially lead to 'general truths' and the establishment of a separate 'communal science' (ibid., 114).

With these universalist aspirations, Vinck echoed the ideas of his friend and IULA supporter, Paul Otlet. At the first congress, in 1913, Otlet had launched the world city project, a grand vision of a new world order based on the collection and interrelation of all 'documents' in their various formats (not only printed matter, but also pictures, photos, sounds, music, 'whatever had evidentiary value') (Boyd Rayward 2003, 5). His ideas are condensed into the notion of the Mundaneum, a gigantic multimedia knowledge centre of books, catalogues, scientific objects, and instruments to 'read' these documents. Otlet is often regarded as the founder of information-science (Day 2001; Laqua 2009), but his information-utopia also directly impacted the activities of the IULA. He attributed a central role to documentation and information in the

organization of the Union. One of the main sub-organizations was an international office that was meant to organize

un service général de documentation ayant pour objet de classer et de cataloguer les publications officielles des villes ainsi que les publications générales sur les villes. Ils les organise en sources de consultation permanente pour les études comparées en matière de construction des villes et de services communaux (*Premier Congrès International et Exposition Comparée des Villes 1913*, Rapports de la seconde Session, 138).

During the First World War, in the neutral Netherlands, a group of people around Otlet and Vinck put together a classification system for ordering all information related to cities. After the war, this megalomaniac 'Encyclopédie des villes' was watered down into a more or less manageable information-system based on an elaborate card system. Information was distributed to members via journals, and the so-called *Tablettes Documentaires Municipales*, making use of a 'higher' version of Dewey's decimal classification scheme (UDC, Universal Decimal Classification).

At the same time, the universalist project was accompanied by a more pragmatic orientation towards individual cities, along the lines of the scientist and urban planner Patrick Geddes, who was a staunch promoter of 'survey before action' (Van Acker 2008; Couperus 2011, 79). The IULA's methods of gathering information gradually shifted from a holistic approach towards the survey method upgraded to an international scale, with a view to integrating global guidelines with local requirements. The British representatives in the IULA were particularly keen on developing more general studies. The practical orientation of the IULA also emerged in the development of an international training programme for municipal employees that was discussed during the 1934 congress in Lyon, and strongly supported by the successor of Wibaut as IULA president, George Montagu Harris.

So, from an organizational perspective, the IULA mainly functioned on the basis of international congresses. Not unimportantly, the congresses also provided subsidies, in particular from philanthropic institutions, such as the *Institut Solvay*. The IULA, in other words, was an international organization that functioned as an information-network rather than as a full-fledged international bureaucracy. Apart from the international congresses, study visits, journals, correspondence, and allied organizations provided the international municipal movement with a

multifaceted information-structure based on circulation and exchange. The success of these forms of circulation is difficult to measure. No doubt, there were political undercurrents. The leading trio of the IULA in the interwar period (Vinck et al.) were connected through international socialist networks, but it was also because of their leading position that they had to tone down their social-democratic ideals in order to avoid polarization within the Union (Dogliani and Gaspari 2003). The apolitical character of the IULA emerged most clearly in the 1930s, when its congresses foregrounded more and more technical issues, such as waste disposal, the reduction of smoke and toxic gases in the urban environment, and the regulation of milk production and delivery. It is telling that the congress of 1936 took place in Berlin, and that the organization accepted large subsidies from the Nazi government.

In sum, the IULA can be seen as a *trait-d'union* between 19th and 20th century forms of transnational cooperation rooted in, on the one hand, utopian ideas of universalism and, on the other, geared towards offering specific tools for urban development. In order to avoid political differences, information processes within the IULA were channelled towards technical and practical issues that had great relevance for municipal employees but did not run the risk of inflaming political dissension. The IULA model of information-gathering and storage is not unique to that organization. Other international organizations include the International Civil Aviation Organisation, a specialized agency of the United Nations that serves as a forum for cooperation in all fields of civil aviation among its 191 member states. Similarly, the League of Nations International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, the forerunner to UNESCO, tried to promote intellectual and cultural exchanges across the social sciences (Iriye 2002; Renoliet 1999, 307–308; Valderrama 1995, 2–10).

Information as a gateway to international legislation: the International Labour Organization

Part XIII of the Peace Treaty of 1919 dealt extensively with labour conditions and how to improve them. The threat of social revolution immediately after the war led the signatory states in Paris to accept the Labour Provisions of the Peace Treaty without much ado. With that the ILO was formally born.

The Treaty and its Labour Provisions were not insignificant. Like EU officials today, ILO representatives referred to the Treaty whenever the occasion arose, usually when agreement and unity had to be forged.

The Treaty, thereby, became an icon of legality and consensus. The organizational structure of the ILO consisted of the General Conference, the Governing Body, and the International Labour Office. The General Conference met at least once a year and was composed of four representatives of each of the member states (i.e., the member states of the League), of whom two were government delegates, and two represented the employers and the workers of each state, respectively. The Governing Body consisted of 24 persons, of whom 12 represented the governments (always including eight representatives of the major industrial countries), six represented the employers, and six the workers. The International Labour Office, which had its seat in Geneva, was the permanent secretariat of the organization, and employed some 400 officials (1930) of numerous nationalities.

The ILO functioned on the basis of tripartism (representatives of governments, employers, and workers), and rigorously followed the procedures laid down in the Treaty. Article 405 set out that the Conference, after having decided on a proposal concerning an item on the agenda, determines whether the proposal takes the form of a draft international convention (for ratification by the members) or a recommendation. Recommendations usually contained the enunciation of an international standard or principle that was above or beyond the possibilities of international agreement (Wilson 1934, 73). It was then up to individual governments to promulgate legislation that was in line with the ILO recommendations. The drafting of conventions and recommendations involved an elaborate study and consultation phase coordinated by the secretariat.

Under the directorship of Albert Thomas, the French socialist reformer and Minister of Munitions during the First World War, the ILO's secretariat became a formidable 'instrument of action' and a veritable 'clearing house' for information on industrial questions. The Office published a wide range of statistical surveys and periodicals, such as the *International Labour Review*, based on international research by its staff in Geneva, and rapidly established itself as a source of information for many governments. Its series of *Studies and Reports* became an authoritative reference for policy-makers, journalists, and scholars around the world. The Office prepared a wide range of conventions and recommendations on very specialized topics for well-defined target groups of governments, employers, and trade unions. Its network of national offices and correspondents throughout the world helped to fulfil its mission.

The economic turn of the ILO carried with it a stronger emphasis on more 'technical' work, such as statistics, planning, and economic

analysis. American membership of the ILO (1934) reinforced the study of planning mechanisms (Van Daele et al. 2010, 251–270), but until the end of the Second World War, the ILO did not manage to become the independent, authoritative institution leading the way out of the economic crisis, as it had perhaps hoped (Haas 1964, 162–163).

By 1939, 63 Conventions and 56 Recommendations had been adopted, and 839 ratifications received (*Report of the Director* 1939, 81–86). Negotiations during the General Conferences and traditional diplomacy were not sufficient to produce these results. Albert Thomas and his staff were continually on the move to mobilize support for the ILO objectives. In a speech at Champigny in 1925, Thomas commented on his travels:

I am hurrying from country to country and from continent to continent – from Berlin to New York, from Bucharest or Prague to Buenos Aires or Rio. Like a wandering Jew of social progress, I go all over the world with my spectacles and my big despatch-case which give the cartoonists so much amusement – only too happy if with my spectacles I can see a little more clearly into national situations and international problems, and if I can carry back in my big despatch-case the ratification of some international Convention or the draft of some national Bill which means a small step forward towards the just and peaceful organisation of the world. (Thomas 1948, 14)

The success of the ILO, however, cannot only be measured in terms of the numbers of ratifications, as the official documents of the organization also acknowledge. The annual reports of the successive directors frequently pointed to the indirect influence of the conventions: 'Their existence sets up a standard which public opinion gradually tends to accept as normal; and one result of this is that they act as a check on any tendency to allow conditions of work to be depressed below that level in times of difficulty' (*Report of the Director* 1939, 83). Also, Ernst Haas, in his path-breaking study, *Beyond the Nation State*, which was based on a thorough analysis of the workings of the ILO, highlighted the long-term framing effects of its interwar activities leading to the Philadelphia Declaration of 1944 and beyond that: 'the discussion of the legislative program *did* give rise to closer, face-to-face relations among representatives of industry, labor, and governments, who were more willing than before to regard as legitimate the continued examination of industrial issues at the international level' (Haas 1964, 415–416).

The self-image of the organization tends to obscure the deeply political nature of its aims and activities. To begin with, social justice was in itself a political goal, and by no means a guarantee for consensus. The post-war 'pacification' constituted a short-lived window of opportunity for the improvement of labour conditions, but the economic crisis that followed again brought to light dramatic differences of opinion. The realization of the ILO's practical aim, international standard-setting, was facilitated by its relative autonomy, but could not be sustained without continuous political manoeuvring during the preparation phase of conventions, during the labour conferences, and afterwards, when agreements had to be implemented in the member states. An example in case are the Belgian difficulties to implement the Hours of Work Convention adopted at the first International Labour Conference held in Washington, DC (1919). As in many other industrialized countries, Belgian trade unions and employers had already fought for decades over the issue of the eight-hour work day. The First World War and the ILO convention accelerated the adoption of a national law on the eight-hour day in 1921, but this did not mean that the Belgian Parliament rushed into ratification of the ILO convention. The early 1920s witnessed marked economic contrasts because of the post-war slump. Belgian employers, after having lost the battle in the national parliament, tried to mobilize support among the Employers' Group in the ILO in order to prevent international regulation of working hours. The Belgian government pursued a cautious protectionist course, and did not actively pursue ratification. The workers, conversely, pushed forward their strongest leaders, nationally and internationally, to avoid beggar-thy-neighbour policies. Support came from Max Gottschalk, the Belgian representative of the ILO, the main liaison between Brussels and Geneva in labour matters, and from the staff of the Solvay Institute for Sociology. In 1926, seven years after the Convention, the Belgian parliament finally ratified the eight-hour working day (Van Daele 2013). The preparation and ratification of ILO conventions, in sum, was a multi-actor and multilevel process that illustrates the deeply political nature of international standard-setting.

The ILO was (and is) an international norm-setter and lawmaker. Its framing capacity in the long run has been remarkable. Admittedly, the long run was all the organization could offer the world, particularly in the 1930s. The difficult environment of the decade leading up to the Second World War (economic depression and totalitarian regimes) pushed the ILO back to acting as a centre of expertise rather than as an 'instrument of action' as Thomas and others had envisaged it.

Nevertheless, its growing global outlook, increasing American support, and persistent reliance on 'knowledge-based' policies made a successful restart possible after 1945. In the long run, 'framing and pushing strategies' (e.g., through agenda setting and information processing) had noticeable effects on 'outcome validity' in the ILO (Walter-Busch 2006). But one needs a historical perspective to observe such trends. Other comparable international organizations that developed international legislation included the League of Nations Health Organisation whose most important work was biological standardization (Borowy 2009).

Information as the key to conflict resolution: the League of Nations

The League of Nations was an international organization founded after World War I, and disbanded at the end of World War II. Its aim was to maintain peace but it had other important functions, namely to act as an umbrella under which a more orderly management of all world affairs (political, economic, financial, cultural, military, and so on) would develop (Northedge 1986, 1–2; Mazower 2000, ch. 2; Webster 2005, 493–518; Clavin 2013). The overriding principle of the peace settlement was national self-determination, which was supposed to mean that everyone had the right to live in a state of their own nationality. The ethnographic map of Europe, especially in the east and south-east, was highly irregular, and national minorities were inevitably left within the new states emerging from the peace settlement, no matter how carefully their borders were drawn (Northedge 1986, 1–2). After the war, the League undertook two broad approaches to the issue of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities. The first was rooted in the idea of the homogenous state and involved population exchanges. The second, revealed in the system of minorities treaties established after the war, was based on the assumption that national minorities might always be characteristic of states and that a method had to be devised for accommodating and/or regulating them (Weisbrod 1993, 361). These treaties were between governments in the conventional sense. They assured the rights of internal minorities whose majority populations were understood to be different ethnically, nationally, or religiously. The treaties were signed between 1919 and 1920 by the Allies and with five states: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Greece. As Jane Cowan points out, this was not the first time that minorities had been protected by treaty; previous agreements, however, were bilateral, involving an external 'protector' state. With the Versailles treaties,

protection of minorities was made a matter of international concern and responsibility (Cowan 2007, 31). Many of the treaties signed after 1918 contained clauses dealing with the protection of minorities, under the guarantee of the League of Nations. The first of these treaties was signed with Poland in June 1919. The rights of minorities, as set out in the treaties, were incorporated into the constitutions of several states, including Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

A small number of former national officials, including Jean Monnet from France, were responsible for setting the foundations, including working practices, of the League's secretariat (Monnet 1978, 82–84). Although today's international organizations are composed of large bureaucracies, the secretariat of the League, at least in its early years, was relatively small and modest. The League's Council was composed of nine states and its Assembly had 47, yet the secretariat relied on a staff of only 20 (*ibid.*, 86). Information and the process of gathering information was vital to the League's work, especially in the field of potential or actual conflict as well as minority protection. The League's Minority Protection System (MPS) and the process of filing petitions with the League in Geneva forms a central focus of analysis in this section of the essay. Petitions or letters were submitted to the League from those who appealed against the denial of their rights. Petitions were vital pieces of information and had huge political significance for the League's members. In highlighting the importance of petitions to changes in international law and politics, Mair (1928, 28) makes clear that 'in certain countries a section of the population has a right of appeal – though this appeal is not invariably heard – not possessed of the majority of subjects of that State, to an authority outside and above its own government'. Strained relations between Poland and Germany posed significant challenges to the MPS, not only as it resulted in a disproportionately large number of petitions, but also as it exposed uniquely the inherent weaknesses of the MPS and its underlying concept of international security, especially the unanimity requirement in the absence of effective enforcement powers (Raitz von Frenzt 1999, 87–92). What is vital here is the legal and political importance of the petition in conflict resolution, and of creating a legal framework for the protection of minority rights. Unsurprisingly, the procedure was the object of strenuous contestation within the League throughout the entire decade of the 1920s (Cowan 2007, 34).

The MPS, headed initially by Erik Colban, a Norwegian diplomat, had a staff of two civil servants: one responsible for the minorities treaties and a second for administrative commissions (territories such as the Saar and Upper Silesia and the city of Danzig (now present-day Gdansk in

Poland)) (*ibid.*, 32). Receiving, processing, and analysing information was at the centre of the section's activity. In comparison with institutional outreach today, MPS officials regularly met with diplomats from the treaty-bound states as well as with community leaders, interest groups, and minority advocates. Colban too travelled frequently, gathering detailed information from the governments of treaty-bound states and representatives of minority groups. Added to this growing body of information, Cowan outlines how European travellers, especially the British, submitted reports of refugee camps they had visited; these were filed, as were newspaper cuttings on revolutionary assassinations and state reprisals or inter-state disputes culled from the regions' national newspapers, especially those newspapers addressed to the European public and published in French or German (*ibid.*). The most important of these activities involved petitions sent by minorities within treaty-bound states to the League. The conditions of receivability of minority petitions were as follows: (a) they had to conform to the object of the treaties; (b) they had to respect the inviolability of the state of which the minority in question formed part; (c) they had to clearly show the source of the petition (anonymous petitions were prohibited); (d) they had to be drafted in temperate language; and (e) they had to contain new facts or facts that had not been included in any petition previously submitted (Hansard 1930, vol. 241, col. 1936–1938). Petitions that did not meet these criteria were returned to the sender by the League's secretariat, although these were few (*ibid.*). The Tittoni Report, adopted by the League's Council on 22 October 1920, stressed that 'the Council must take action in the event of any infraction or danger of infraction, of any of the obligations with regard to the minorities in question' (Raitz von Frenzt 1999, 92). Since in October 1920 the agenda of the Council had not yet been stretched to its limits by a flood of politically motivated petitions, instigated by minority organizations, the Report accorded a largely clerical role to the secretariat and instructed it to communicate all petitions without comment to the members of the Council for information. The Report also addressed the distribution of petitions, although on this subject it raised more questions than it answered. While the accused state, if it was a League member, was entitled to be informed at the same time as the Council of the subject of the petition, no deadline was imposed for its observations. Colban was conscious that cases might arise in which the government concerned would be less inclined to give the Council its wholehearted assistance if certain petitions were distributed to 52 governments. More specifically, Colban referred to the possibility of malicious propaganda in the form

of petitions 'which might throw discredit on some State if the document in question were published or commented on by the Press' (*ibid.*, 93).

The MPS assisted the Council in the examination of the 950 petitions submitted between 1921 and 1939. This included establishing the receivability of petitions and, for the 550 receivable petitions, preparing files for the Committee of Three (who examined each petition). Apart from a copy of the petition and the government's comment, these files often included additional information that had to be gathered through further correspondence with the interested government and with local League representatives, and sometimes through visits by members of the MPS themselves. Its director frequently attended meetings of the Committees and gave recommendations as to which course of action should be taken (Cowan 2003, 271–292). Dossiers were produced about the authors of the petitions. It was vital for the director to establish and maintain personal contacts with the governments of the minority states because the smooth running of the unwritten preliminary procedure largely depended on their cooperation.

In conclusion, the process of information-gathering by the League's MPS was political from the outset. Travelling to treaty-bound states with minority residents, filing reports, receiving, and examining petitions, collecting newspaper cuttings, and so on gave the MPS a degree of power through information-gathering and analysis. Its mission was to receive petitions and forward these to the Committees of Three who would objectively assess each complaint or infraction of minority rights. Through formal and informal processes of information-gathering, the MPS, with a small secretariat, attempted to find solutions to many of these infractions before they reached the Council's agenda. Charged with examining the admissibility of each petition, the MPS, which had limited powers and dubious legal standing, found itself being manipulated by Council members with political objectives. Both Poland and Germany used the MPS as a vehicle to damage the credibility of the other on an international stage, a strategy that ran counter to the original aims of the League. The flow of petitions from the German minority in Poland to the MPS varied, and many of the individual petitions were not political in nature but were used by Berlin to cause Warsaw embarrassment at the League. Indeed, the evidence suggests that Berlin funded many of the minority groups in Poland, financial assistance that was vital to pay for legal advice and translate petitions into French. While the information contained in the petitions was important, an increasing number sent to the League were politically motivated and this same information, at times, was of questionable provenance with dangerous political motives.

Conclusions

International organizations come in many shapes and sizes. One of the characteristics they tend to share is that they serve as clearing houses for information. 'They collect and publish information and statistics; report on and study issues of importance to the institution; and inform, educate, influence, persuade, and disseminate the organization's values and beliefs' (MacKenzie 2010, 3). The international organizations that came into being in the first decades of the last century were seeking organizational structures, internal procedures, and information management systems that would serve their goals. There were still relatively few permanent international organizations, in particular among governments, that could act as models. Hence, this chapter has identified a variety of arrangements.

The chapter has isolated three models of information processing and reviewed three international organizations focusing on their mission, formal structures, and particularly on the role of 'information' in realizing the stated goals. Although all three were trying to uphold the idea that they were fact-finders and keepers of unbiased, 'neutral', and 'scientific' information, or at least that they were dealing with the information they obtained in an impartial way, 'politics' entered the stage in many forms, especially at the League and at the ILO. In terms of constitutive and operational politics, the chapter observed that the international organizations examined here showed markedly different arrangements. The IULA, for instance, was 'constituted' as a network, and its functioning reflected the strengths and weaknesses thereof. Its emphasis on the collection and use of systematic information, as promoted by Otlet, was counterbalanced by its lack of internal cohesion and external power. The Minority Protection Service of the League of Nations was established to defend minority rights as a component of peacekeeping, but triggered national confrontations based on information that was, at times, less than reliable and highly sensitive. The Paris Peace Treaty laid down an elaborate system of international legal protection in the field of labour conditions, based on tripartism, which at the same time created all kinds of tensions among the stakeholders, especially during the economic and financial crisis at the latter end of the 1920s (Clavin and Wessels 2004).

More generally, this chapter makes the following observations. First, particularly in the early days of the IULA, 'information' was regarded as a goal in itself: the creation of a knowledge-base system where knowledge would be attained through the accumulation of information. By organizing documentation and information, world peace would ultimately be

achieved. Utopian politics assumed a highly concrete form in the aims and internal organization of the IULA. Second, the chapter has identified quite a few instances where issues were depoliticized through a 'retreat' into technical-scientific discussions that required highly specialized information. Examples can be found in the IULA and ILO strategies in the 1930s, but arguably similar findings might be found in the 'technical' organizations of the League, such as the Economic and Financial Organisation or the Health Organisation. Third, the collection and dissemination of information obviously stemmed from the overall goals of the international organizations that have been studied. These goals were intrinsically political: autonomy of cities, minority protection, and social justice for women and children, even international law. Implementing international legislation, structuring transnational cooperation and supranational arbitration in these fields inevitably politicized the decision-making processes, mobilized certain actors, and excluded others. Politics breeds politics. Fourth, at times the information that international organizations received was already politically radioactive and officials, especially at the League, knew this. Their task was more than just processing information; the information they received required a keen sense of political (and historical) awareness. Forwarding the information to the next level (e.g., the League's Council) could have major political implications in terms of relations between states (as in the case of Poland and Germany).

The three types of information processes examined in the chapter – knowledge base, framing international legislation, and conflict resolution and mediation – have contributed to a wider understanding of the multifaceted use of information in the interwar years, as the world moved towards building international frameworks to manage issues of major concern. Information was a scientific tool for the collective good, such as improved urban development or norms and standards for labour rights and women's issues. At the same time, information (and its provenance) was also sometimes used as a tool of contestation on the international stage, pitting countries against one another while simultaneously acting as a force for mediation and conflict resolution. The information processing framework adopted in this chapter has revealed that interwar international organizations faced similar, if not greater, challenges to those institutions created after 1945 which are examined in other chapters of this book. Yet, what connects the two periods is the heavy dependency on information and how it is used to acquire knowledge and formulate policy in international affairs. An analysis of interwar international organizations provides an important basis for studying the institutions of the EU.

4

The Politics of Peer Reviewing: Comparing the OECD and the EU

Thomas Conzelmann

Introduction: governance by information in international organizations

Aside from the traditional instruments of public actors to govern societies – namely law and monetary incentives – 'governance by information' has become an increasingly widely used mode of governance (Bogdandy and Goldmann 2008, 243–244). If this is true at the domestic level, global politics reaching 'beyond the nation state' relies even more strongly on governance by information. In fact, one of the primary sources of the power of International Organizations (IOs) and their attendant bureaucracies is their capacity to gather and aggregate information and to transform it into socially relevant knowledge 'by giving meaning to information' (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 29–30; also see Blom and Vanhoonacker, Chapter 1 of this volume).

These observations lead to a number of specific research questions. Empirically, we are interested in analysing the way in which governance by information is organized: which sources of information do IOs draw on; how do they select relevant from less relevant information; and how are these processes linked to the creation of knowledge? Both the formal procedures through which information is processed – the 'constitutive politics' of informing, as they are called in the opening chapter to the current volume – and the ways in which these procedures work in practice – the 'operational politics' of informing – are important in this respect. Normatively speaking, there is the question of how the increasing role of non-elected, but information-rich, actors (for instance, the European Commission, but also other international bureaucracies, experts, or non-governmental organizations) can be reconciled with democratic principles. While it is often argued that 'unaccountable'