

THE EUROPEAN AEROPOSTAL CONFERENCE, 1938

by Charles J. G. Verge

The purpose of this article is to illustrate Ireland's participation in the European Aeropostal Conference of 1938 by pointing out the different statistics and responses to questions provided by Ireland and some European countries relative to the transport of air mail to and from Ireland in the 30s. Ireland did not participate in any of the Conferences called prior to the Brussels Conference to prepare for it. However, the information provided will help the Irish postal historian or air mail enthusiast to acquire additional knowledge on Irish air mails.

The Universal Postal Union (U.P.U.) spent most of the 1930s on preparing for a European Aeropostal Conference to be held in Brussels in 1938. The following events led to this Conference.

- 1- Unofficial Conference held at Brussels in October 1930.
- 2- A Questionnaire sent out by the U.P.U. to be completed and returned to Berne by March 20, 1931.
- 3- A preparatory Commission held at Praha, Czechoslovakia on June 8, 1931.
- 4- International Bureau (U.P.U.) questionnaire June 25, 1931.
- 5- Circular letter (6572) from the U.P.U. dated August 12, 1931.
- 6- Circular letter (283) from the U.P.U. dated January 14, 1932.
- 7- Limited Conference, The Hague, April 13-16, 1937.
- 8- Limited Conference, Paris, June 15-19, 1937.

The Unofficial Conference of October 1930 laid down the ground rules for the investigation of ways to improve the transport of air mails in Europe and, through the European networks, to the remainder of the world. It paid particular attention to questions relating to night air mails started in Central Europe and the possibility for their expansion. Airlines were taking on a greater role in providing quick and efficient delivery of mail. The English and the Germans, along with the French, were establishing new air routes faster than the Postal Administrations could deal with them. It became evident that, if air mail was to become a viable proposition, some kind of concerted effort would be needed to ensure adequate acceleration of the mails and sound, efficient and effective air mail contracts.

The preparatory Commission held at Praha in June of 1931 reviewed the answers to a questionnaire that the different European Postal Authorities had been asked to fill in early 1931. As a result, additional questions were raised and answers were required through requests emanating from the Bureau of the U.P.U. in the form of circular letters.

Ireland answered but a few of the questions of the original survey. The questionnaire, mentioned above, contained three questions. Question Two, on the other hand, was subdivided into 6 parts. Ireland answered only Questions 1 and 2c. The questions and answers are listed below.

Question 1 Importance of traffic.

Letters and cards only exchanged between large European

centres. The count and the weight should be made by the exchange office and effected on each of the deliveries made in the day.

Ireland's answer:

IRELAND (Free State)		
Total number and weight of letters and postal cards sent, by year, to the following European countries:		
Name of country	Number of Letters & P. Cards	Weight (kgs.)
Germany (1)	275,418	2,574
Austria	5,252	49
Belgium	105,716	988
Bulgaria	1,144	11
Denmark	5,096	48
Spain	43,121	403
Finland	676	6
Great Britain	31,440,600	293,837
Greece	4,004	37
Hungary	1,560	15
Italy	112,671	1,053
Latvia	1,300	12
Lithuania	884	8
Luxembourg	1,300	12
Norway	2,132	20
Netherlands	37,557	351
Poland	1,456	14
Portugal	4,316	40
Romania	1,664	16
Sarre	260	2
Sweden	7,124	67
Switzerland	77,896	728
Czechoslovakia	8,268	79
Turkey	1,248	12
U.S.S.R.	2,808	26
Yugoslavia	2,548	24
Malta and Gibraltar	14,768	138

N.B.: The number of air mails posted at Dublin does not exceed 40 per day. The average weight of each piece of mail is 1 ounce avoirdupois. 73% of the total number of air mails are destined for the London-Karachi service and 11% to the European services.

As well the following countries also provided information, in answer to Question 1, concerning the mails that originated in their country and destined to Ireland.

Belgium

Total weight of probable air mails to Ireland (year): 500 kgs.

Hungary

Number of letters (year): 3,746

Number of Post Cards (year): 970

Total weight (year): 47.63 kgs.

Total weight (day): 0.13 kg.

Romania

Total weight of letters (year): 20 kgs.

Total weight of Post Cards: n/a

Question 2 c)

Airmail surcharge:

Should the surcharge be maintained or eliminated?

Ireland's answer:

The Irish Office is of the opinion that the airmail surcharge be maintained.

Ireland also provided additional information as a result of the June 25, 1931 questionnaire from the Bureau International of the U.P.U. This information may be of help to the student of airmails, particularly Irish acceptance flights.

Other countries also provided additional information concerning their mails to Ireland:

Country of origin	Weight by day (kg) surface mail	Hours of departure	% of air mail	Weight (kg)	Sur-charged mail	Weight of sur-charged mail (kg)
Germany (1)	16,000	3h55	3	0,480	----	0,200
Belgium	1,000	5h15	1	0,010	----	0,006
Latvia	0,800	16h10	---	-----	-----	-----
Switzerland	3,500	22h20	100	3,500	----	-----

The circular letters of August 1931 and January 1932, emanating from the U.P.U., enquired as to which air line company would be given the responsibility to exploit new routes should they be created. As well, the U.P.U. wished to know if countries were considering providing subsidies to the operator and what technical questions were raised by such new air mail routes.

Ireland's answer to both these letters was:

In the Irish Free State there exists no air mail service and no air line companies.

Students of Irish air mails will recall that the European air carriers of the period and foreign governments were more interested in this mode of conveyance of the mails from the Irish territory than the Irish themselves. The acceleration of mails from the "Karlsruhe" from Galway to London in 1929 and the experimental flight from Galway to Berlin in 1932 are cases in point.

For the Irish, the full blown 1938 European Aeropostal Conference in Brussels, was one of look and listen. There are no recorded interventions from the two Irish delegates. Ireland was represented at the conference by two of its senior postal employees, P. S. O'Heigheartaigh, its longtime Secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and the Deputy Director of Posts, S. S. Puirseal. At the conclusion of the Conference a final report was published which, for some unknown reason, was signed only by Mr. O'Heigheartaigh.

I hope that this article has been of interest to the readers and has added a bit of information to the study of Irish aerophilately.

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IRELAND (Free State)		
Country of destination	Daily weight (Letters and cards) of mails sent by surface means (kgs)	Approximate % of air mails
Germany (1)	7.650	(2)
Austria	0.150	
Belgium	2.660	
Bulgaria	0.030	
Denmark	0.140	
Spain	1.200	
Estonia	0.005	
Finland	0.020	
France	7.800	
Greece	0.110	
Hungary	0.040	
Italy	3.100	
Latvia	0.040	
Lithuania	0.020	
Norway	0.060	
Netherlands	0.770	
Poland	0.040	
Portugal	0.120	
Romania	0.050	
Sweden	0.200	
Switzerland	2.160	
Czechoslovakia	0.230	
U.S.S.R.	0.080	
Yugoslavia	0.070	

(1) The proceedings of the Conference were compiled in French. I have kept that order in preparing the Tables. Therefore the French original does not result in an English alphabetic order.

(2) Eight (8) mails, of an average 150 grammes, are sent, per day, to Great Britain to be included in its air mails to be sent to other European countries.

90) the appointment of a new Chairman for An Post - he is Vivian Murray, formerly with the Irish Goods Council and holder of a number of previous semi-State positions. One of his major tasks will be to tackle the continuing industrial problems and staff shortages (with Chief Executive Gerard Harvey) which continue to beset the postal service.

